Wrestling With The Truth

Bruno Lauer

Wrestling with the Truth

by Bruno Lauer, with Scott Teal

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Published by Crowbar Press
106 Tattnall Court
Gallatin, Tennessee.
crowbarpress.com

Book and cover layout by Scott Teal

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data
Lauer, Bruno
Wrestling with the Truth / by Bruno Lauer, with Scott Teal — Kindle ed.
1. Lauer, Bruno. 2. Sports–United States–Biography. 3. Wrestling–United States–Biography. I. Teal, Scott. II. Title.

Printed in the United States of America
ISBN 978-0-9745545-7-0 [print edition]

First print edition: June 2008
Kindle edition: April 2014

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Testimonials

When I first got into the wrestling business, Bruno was the first guy in Memphis to open up to me. He welcomed me into the business with open arms, and that's something I will never forget. Bruno really helped me get over during my developmental stage by teaching me many of the ins and outs of the business, both by watching him in action and by using him as a tackling dummy. His book is phenomenal and I highly recommend it to everybody. You will learn a lot about the business of professional wrestling, and in the process, you will laugh your ass off.
Good luck to a true friend!
– Kurt Angle –

A unique perspective from one of the most unique characters in the history of the business. Bruno's honesty can be, at times, a little painful, but it's always refreshing.
– Mick Foley, New York Times best-selling

author –

Entertaining, visual, and vicious. A memorable memoir by a veteran performer who has seen and done it all in sports entertainment.
– Chris Jericho, New York Times best-selling author –

Bruno's a great guy. He's one of the guys who has been there for me since the beginning. From day one, before I was anything, he told me that I was going to be a huge star, and for that alone, I'll never forget him. He's always there to help me accomplish the things I need to get done. More importantly, I look forward to seeing him on the road every week because he always has a big smile and is always happy to see me.
– Batista –

Bruno is the hardest working man in show business!
– John Cena –

Foreword by Dwayne "The Rock" Johnson

"A true friend doesn't come to bail you out of jail when you get arrested; a true friend is sitting next to you in the cell saying, "Well, that sure was fun."

Bruno Lauer and I have shared an extraordinary friendship that has spanned more than 20 years. Throughout that time, the same words come to mind when I think of Bruno — loyal, reliable, and funny as hell!

He is an individual who has always had his finger on the pulse of the professional wrestling industry. He has successfully navigated through professional wrestling's ever-changing landscape, and has always been a consistent figure among the mayhem of evolving characters. People came and left, superstars were created and then faded away, but Bruno was always there. I'm so proud that he

has completed this very personal project and congratulate him on its successful publication. It wasn't always easy, Bruno … but it sure was fun!

Much love and respect.

Your friend,
Dwayne "The Rock" Johnson

Acknowledgements

Within a time span that totals almost 30 years, there are obviously a lot of people who were instrumental in keeping me in the business, and helping me continue to make a living in my chosen profession for such a long time. I am very grateful to each and every person who has contributed to my life, whether it was through giving me a job, getting me a job, helping me keep a job, teaching me ways to improve my performance, ways to improve my life in general, or just being a friend.

I'm sure that I'm going to forget somebody here and end up with heat on myself, so if I forgot to mention you here, then please accept my deepest apology. That is, if you deserve it! I reserve the right to have the final say on whether or not you deserve one.

Here goes …

Thanks to:

– Mama and Daddy, of course, for letting me run wild. If they hadn't, I would be approaching retirement and (maybe) a pension from a regular 9-to-5 job. Wait a minute! Maybe I should be cursing them for not reining me in. (Just kidding.)

– Jerry Lawler, for many things: giving me my first real break in the business; allowing me to set down roots and a home in the Memphis area for life; making me a star in the Memphis territory for many years, and simply for being a great friend. Oh, yes … and thanks for allowing me to live in the shed … I mean, your guest house.

– Rip Rogers, for giving me a job in Kansas City in 1987 when I really needed it.

– Sid Eudy, for arranging my initial tryout with the WWF, for which I will always be grateful. I also thank you for not killing me brutally during the years we traveled together.

– Johnny "Ace" Laurinaitus, for being such a great guy and a good friend. It has been a pleasure and a privilege to work with you.

– Jim Ross, who always made sure I got paid.

– J.J. Dillon, who introduced me to a whole new side of the business at a time when my managing career was headed downhill.

– Pat Patterson, for being a good friend and a monkey-wrench (inside joke).

– Eddie "Boss" Winders, for being there for me through the years as a friend.

– Brad Dykens, the webmaster of the incredible "Online World of Wrestling" website, for initializing the making of this project and proofreading the (semi) final manuscript.

– J Michael Kenyon, for his keen eye to detail when it came to proofreading the final version of the manuscript.

I would be very short-sighted if I failed to mention the following individuals, each of whom has been a positive influence in my life through the years (in alphabetical order): Gene Alday, Kurt Angle, Dave Batista, Larry Billings, Charley Blaylock, Jonathan Coachman, Reshelle Dandridge, the late Mike Davis, Carl Fergie, Ric Flair, Mick Foley, Robert Fuller, Triple H, Stacy Humphrey, the late Christine Jarrett, Jerry Jarrett, Chris Jericho, Dwayne "The Rock" Johnson, Rocky Johnson, "JBL" Layfield, Dale Mann, Eddie Marlin, Alberta Martin, Bill Massey, Shawn Michaels, Butch Pitts, Chuck Poe, James Albert Riley, Geto Tattrie, Undertaker, and Buddy Wayne.

I'll never be able to thank Vince McMahon enough for believing in me and allowing me to be a part of the WWE family. The same goes for the entire McMahon family — Linda, Stephanie, and Shane — who made (and still do) me feel like I am a part of their immediate family. You have my loyalty and respect always.

I can't forget my editor, Scott Teal, who worked tirelessly to make this project a reality. He knows more about me and the things I've done than I do! This guy not only remembers days and dates, but he can tell you the exact time of day a match took place, and what the weather was in the town! Thanks, Scott. You are truly one of a kind.

A special, heartfelt thanks goes to Steve Lombardi, for being an honest-to-goodness, genuine, true friend, who even though I complain when he rides me about my diet and exercise habits (or lack, thereof), I really appreciate his concern for my health and well-being. He always looks out for my best interests, especially when I don't always do it for myself!

Last, but certainly not least, I would like to thank God for EVERYTHING!

Bruno Lauer

Walls, Mississippi

Chapter 1
Fast Track to Nowhere

I was born Bruno Lauer in Allegheny County, Pennsylvania, to Hank and Dolores Lauer. Yes, my real name is Bruno Lauer. It's funny, but for some reason, Wikipedia posted the erroneous fact that my real name is David Lauer, which is totally false. Shortly after the bogus information was posted online, countless websites began listing me as "David," which really pisses me off. I have no idea where the "David" came from. The name typed on my birth certificate is Bruno Lauer … no David, no middle name, just Bruno Lauer.

Thankfully, both of my parents are still living. Mama was a church secretary at a Catholic school in Pittsburgh, while Daddy traveled the gulf coast in the oil refinery business before it tanked (no pun intended). The lack of work in the area due to the oil bust, along with the extremely low-

paying, almost-volunteer job that Mama held, resulted in my childhood being one of near poverty.

My parents were, and still are, wonderful Christian people. They did their best to raise me properly, but I was incorrigible. They didn't purposely allow me to run wild, but I had my own mind and wanted to go my own way. I'm not proud of some of the things I said to my parents when I was young. Perhaps I resented not having all of the "stuff" that I thought I should have.

It isn't easy to be poor, and it isn't fun. If anybody ever tries to convince you that it is, they're lying. Whenever you see an old movie or TV show that portrays poor, impoverished, country people having group campfires and sing-a-longs, while the women from each household pitch in by bringing their favorite dishes for the community feast, my advice to you is to change the channel immediately, because that portrayal of poverty is as much of a fantasy as Star Wars or, dare I say it,

the cultish and universally-revered Star Trek series.

In the real world, when you're 13 years old, and you can't even imagine how you could scrape up enough money to buy a soft drink, let alone afford the luxury of an ice cream treat, the world is a very gloomy and unhappy place. When the Good Humor man would drive through the neighborhood, ringing his bells and playing his music, it was almost as if God was playing a cruel prank. Having a dollar bill, or even two quarters to rub together, seemed as unattainable as owning a brand new car. It was nice to dream about such things, but they were nothing more than fantasies.

The important thing is: my parents always made sure I had what I needed, and I never went without food, clean clothes, and a clean place to live.

Quite understandably, living in that type of an environment wasn't exactly an inducement to attend school, let alone to study and make good

grades. It was quite the opposite, actually. What purpose did algebra, ancient history, geometry, or any of the other subjects serve when you couldn't even afford to buy a can of Dr. Pepper? Where in the real world would knowledge about the original leaders of Europe during the Renaissance period ever help anybody buy a car, or put food on the table?

Well, I certainly don't mean for this diatribe to serve as an example to today's youth, but in my opinion, I felt like my time could be used in a more constructive fashion. I had no desire to sit in a hot, un-air-conditioned classroom with a bunch of kids who were motivated to be there almost as much as I was, which truthfully, was not at all. Of course, my parents were dead-set against me quitting school, especially since I had no plan of action and no goal for my future. I didn't have a job, primarily because I didn't have reliable transportation. I didn't want to steal or sell dope, either.

Basically, with no skills and no motivation to break the law, I was up the proverbial creek without a paddle.

My entire resume consisted of sitting on the hoods of cars with my friends, smoking cigarettes, throwing a Frisbee, trying to convince older kids to buy us a quart of beer, drinking beer, vomiting, and trying to sneak back into the house without my parents discovering that my whole life consisted of the above activities. I was on a fast track to nowhere with a non-stop ticket.

One warm spring afternoon in 1979, a relatively minor incident (at the time, anyway) in my 13th year on the planet changed, and probably saved, my life. One of the guys in our neighborhood who owned a car — a fat, smelly, unshaven fellow nick-named "Stink-Ass" was going to a carnival in western Pennsylvania. "Stink-Ass" wasn't his real name, but that's how we referred to him. His real name was Kerry, so to his face, we called him "Care Bear." Everyone looked up to him as their

idol (because he had a station wagon and a legitimate driver's license). Stink-Ass wanted to know if any of us "street kids" wanted to go to the carnival with him. That question almost was like asking a group of prisoners serving life sentences if they'd like to get out of jail.

I don't know how eight juvenile delinquents and one Stink-Ass could fit into one Chevrolet station wagon, but somehow, we all managed to squeeze in. Forty miles, two quarts of beer, four cigarettes, and one gas stop (25¢ each was the going rate) later, we arrived at the fairgrounds.

Now keep in mind: I'm a Mississippian. I've lived in the great state of Mississippi for the better part of my life and I plan to live there until the day I'm laid to rest. However, I spent a good portion of my childhood in western Pennsylvania. That was where I was impoverished. That was where I was going to school at the time. And that is where the fair was located. The reason I feel inclined to point that out is purely for the comparisons which

follow.

Fairs and carnivals in Mississippi are wonderful, joyful events. The features of the fairs are exhibits of beautiful, farm animals, and wild (but domesticated) animals. Highlights of the fairs include mud races, barbecue contests, talent shows, pie-eating contests, and on and on.

The fair we attended in Pennsylvania had absolutely nothing in common with the Mississippi fairs. There were no animals, farm or otherwise. There were no mud races. There wasn't even any mud. Barbecue wasn't even a known item that far north. Basically, the only things to do were to eat hot dogs that had been reheated several times, eat cotton candy that had the taste and appearance of dryer lint, drink Coca-Cola that was flat and warmer than the hot dogs, and/or play the obviously crooked and rigged carnival games that cost more to play than the value of the prizes that were offered the "winners."

Of course, even those very unattractive options were off limits to me and my friends, due to the simple fact that we had no money.

Stink-Ass was on the payroll to help tear down the tents, and since it was the closing night of the fair, he was able to finagle us a free entry into the event. The excitement of the fair was such that, in less than an hour, I was wishing that I was smoking cigarettes on the street corner back in Allegheny County. In that scenario, I could at least go home when I was ready. As it was, I was 40 miles away from my mama's house–broke, bored, and worst of all, I couldn't leave until the fair closed and the fair crew had finished the job of dismantling the tents.

The other boys who came with Stink-Ass were just as bored as I was, but they found something to otherwise occupy their time–marijuana. Drugs were something of which I had not the slightest bit of interest, so as the boys began to excitedly pass the joint around to each other, I started to wander

around the fairgrounds. Wanting to make the best of a bad situation, my first intent was to look for girls, although I knew my chances of scoring that night were extremely small. With no money to offer the purchase of a hot dog or an ice cream cone, I knew I would be on my own for the remainder of our time there.

As I wandered around aimlessly, I looked behind a fence and saw a sectioned-off area with a crowd of people sitting in bleachers (and some sitting on folding chairs). They were hollering, clapping, and seemingly having a good time. Deciding to get a better look, I made my way over to the area–and discovered a professional wrestling event taking place.

I had never seen pro wrestling in person before, although I had seen it occasionally on television. As I attempted to shuffle in to sit down and watch the action, a man stopped me and growled, "If you wanna see the rasslin', it'll cost you three dollars. The show ain't included with

your fair admission."

He didn't seem to be very concerned when I tried to explain that I just needed a place to wait while my ride finished working on the midway. "No three dollars, no wrestling … period!"

As I started to make my way back into the fairgrounds, another man stopped me. "I'm on the crew that's in charge of the ring. If you'll help me and another guy take it down and load it onto the truck after the show, I'll get you into the show."

Not having anything better to do, I agreed.

I didn't know it at the time, but that chance meeting marked the beginning of what would turn out to be a career spanning four separate decades.

I don't know who actually wrestled that night in western Pennsylvania, although considering the pitiful quality of the fairgrounds at which the show was held, I can safely assume it was nobody of much consequence. There were far more

mosquitoes than there were spectators. What they lacked in numbers, however, they made up for in enthusiasm. I hadn't heard that much hollering, foul language, foot-stomping, and general obnoxiousness since the last time my mama's kin folk came up from Mississippi for a funeral.

By the time the show was over, I was ready to take down the ring and go home. However, the crew I was supposed to assist had disappeared into a trailer with the wrestlers, the referee, and the men I assumed were the promoters, evidently to take care of whatever business wrestling people took care of. (At that time, I had no earthly idea about what kind of life I was unknowingly about to get myself into!) I decided to just sit down and wait, so I waited … and waited … and waited.

It never occurred to me to just get up and sneak away because I wasn't raised that way. I told them I would help them take down the ring and that's exactly what I was going to do. The problem I had was that I couldn't start without them because I had

no idea of how to even begin to dismantle that monster.

After a few hours, Stink-Ass and the rest of the street urchins showed up. They were ready to leave, so when I told them I couldn't leave until I helped take down the wrestling ring, they wouldn't hear of it, especially Stink-Ass. He was adamant that they leave without delay, so the ultimatum was to leave at that moment or find my own way back home. Well, up to that time, I had spent my whole life doing things the way I wanted and when I wanted to do them, and I wasn't going to make an exception in that case. Even though I was forty miles from mama's house, I sent them on their way. I was actually going to do some meaningful labor for once in my life, and I was damned if Stink-Ass and a bunch of weed-heads were going to stop me from keeping my word.

Off they went, and finally, in less time than it took for the dinosaurs to become extinct (slightly), the crew arrived. They immediately began showing

me what to do, how to do it, and where to put the various parts and pieces of the ring. At first, I thought it was only my imagination, but it seemed as if I was doing most of the work. The rest of the crew supervised, smoked cigarettes, drank beer, and supervised some more. That was heavy, hard work, especially for a 110-pound, 13-year-old punk, who had never been asked to do one day of physical labor in his life.

When "we" were finally finished, Marty, the guy who "recruited" me for the endeavor, thanked me and offered me a can of beer, which I readily accepted. He also handed me a ten dollar bill! It may be hard for some people to understand this, but as I alluded to earlier, at that stage in my life, I never had ten dollars of my own ... EVER!

I thought I had hit the jackpot, but what came next really sent me over the edge. Marty told me they were going to Ohio for a six-show tour, and if I wanted to go and be their slave (well, they actually said "help them," but that's basically what it

amounted to), they would pay me ten dollars a day, feed me, and give me a place to stay while I was on the road. That sounded good to me, so I accepted their offer and off we went.

When you're a 13-year-old kid and an opportunity like that comes up, you don't burden yourself with minor details, such as letting your parents know where you are, what you're doing, or, more importantly, how you plan to get back home. All three of those details would definitely be worth considering, but at that time, ten bucks, a can of warm beer, and a six-day road trip took precedence over anything else in life.

I could go into detail about the Ohio tour, but it would be very redundant. Suffice it to say that we presented six carbon copies of the Pennsylvania wrestling show at six different fairs in Ohio.

The only thing about the tour that really stands out in my memory is the fact that I wasn't allowed to enter the trailers where the wrestlers dressed, even

when I brought back the ring jackets from the ring. I had to knock on the trailer door and timidly hand the items through a crack in the door, then quickly make my exit as the door slammed shut.

When I look back on it now, with the mindset of somebody who has been in the business for 29 years, those wrestlers (with the exception of one, who I'll talk about in a moment) were probably the worst-looking, most untalented, group of "athletes" to ever perform in a wrestling ring, but they really took themselves and the business seriously. However, after watching the same ten wrestlers have the same five matches and battle royal every night for six straight nights, with the same outcome every night, and the same occurrences in the matches, even a semi-educated little whelp like me could figure out, that maybe … just maybe … wrestling was fake!

Today, 29 years later, please allow me to say that my assumption was incorrect. The wrestling business is not fake.

Hold on, now. Don't get me wrong. I'm not trying to insult your intelligence. "Fake" just isn't the right word, by any means. After 29 years of getting beaten up (sometimes badly) in the name of professional wrestling, and, of course, nowadays, "sports entertainment," there are a lot more appropriate terms to describe our profession. In my opinion, pre-determined is the best term. It doesn't hurt any less just because you know ahead of time that you're going to be body-slammed. You can't "fake" gravity.

Chapter 2
The Difference Between My Ass and My Elbow

During the six days I was on the tour, I got to know one of the wrestlers, a New Zealander named Lord Jonathan Boyd. I would later come to the realization that he was the only wrestler on that tour who was ever of any consequence.

Boyd had actually worked on top in many of the various territories in the country, as well as overseas. He wrestled primarily as a single until he met Norman Frederick Charles III. Forming a tag team called the Royal Kangaroos, the two wrestled in Australia, Samoa, Africa, New Guinea, New Zealand, and Japan. They also wrestled before the Queen of England on two

separate occasions in London at Covent Gardens and Earl's Court.

By this time, however, sad to say, he was on his way back down the ladder, which is why he was a participant on a tour that featured a ring crew whose main laborer was a 13-year-old kid with no way home.

By the time the fifth day of the tour rolled around, Boyd had really taken a liking to me. I knew that because each night, not only would he share his beer with me, but he would request to have me as his roommate. The fact that he didn't sexually assault me in any way was a plus, especially now, 29 years later, when I'm 15 years into the realization that old Lord Jonathan was a confirmed bisexual. Evidently, I either wasn't handsome enough for him, or I was too young. I hope it wasn't because I wasn't handsome enough. That would have hurt my feelings. Don't get me wrong. I'm not gay, and I never have been, but it would have been flattering to know I was

handsome enough to be thought of.

Back to the story: With only one day left on the tour, I was in a real bind, and Jonathan knew it. I had no way to get home, and I had nothing else going for me once the tour was over. After the final match on the last night, Jonathan walked up and handed me $50 (at which point I almost went into cardiac arrest), telling me to use it to buy a bus ticket back to Valemont Heights, Pennsylvania. He also gave me a phone number for a promoter in Kentucky named Dale Mann. Jonathan thought he might be able to talk Dale into using me on his ring crew for the remainder of the summer season.

At that time, it didn't dawn on me, but when I was paid for my services on the first night, I had become a professional in the wrestling business. I didn't know it at the time, but I was on my way.

To be completely honest, the first thing I did after I made my peace with Mama for taking off to Ohio

(and not letting her know my whereabouts until two days into the tour with a collect call) was find Stink-Ass's car and throw a cinderblock through the windshield. I know it wasn't the right thing to do, but it seemed appropriate at the time.

The second thing I did was call Dale Mann. Thankfully, Jonathan Boyd had kept his word and had told him that I would be calling, so Dale knew who I was and he was expecting my call. I was happy to know that Dale had a whole summer's worth of shows scheduled, with the first show being held in Kentucky. The crew would then work their way up to Pennsylvania, over to Ohio (which I was becoming quite familiar with), and finally, oddly enough, up to the Dakotas for two weeks.

Dale told me that he would love to use me on the tour and wondered if I had ever worked as a manager. Apparently, Jonathan Boyd's drunken, drug-induced ravings about how I had the right look and size to be a manager weren't limited to

me. He had told Dale Mann that I would be an ideal little manager to help enhance the matches on his wrestling events. What old Lord Jonathan failed to mention was that I had only been involved in the business for less than a month. To say the least, not only had I never managed at ringside, but I wasn't even "smart" to the business yet.

My mama didn't raise me to be a liar, so when I answered Dale Mann's question, I answered him honestly. "Yes, of course I've managed before."

I was also honest when he asked about my age. "I just turned seventeen years old."

Finally, when Dale asked about my confidence in my ability as a manager, I told him, "Yes, I'm sure I can help enhance your wrestling shows."

He then asked me what kind of outfit I wore when I managed. Oh, boy. Not only was I about to fake my way into doing something I had never done before, but I was in the position of having to lie

about how I dressed when I did it! I told him that I always wore a blue suit and tie.

"That's great," he said. "John Boyd's word is good enough for me. I'm looking forward to meeting you and working together."

I had less than two weeks to get ready. I didn't own a suit and all I had to my name was the change from the $50 bus fare that Jonathan had given me, which was about $12.

Here I was, a few months shy of 14 years old, and I had bluffed my way onto a pro wrestling tour as a manager, and I didn't have the first idea about what I was doing. It's sad to say this, but there are a lot of guys making a lot of money these days who have about the same amount of knowledge that I did at that time, and they don't even realize it.

One of my friends had seen an ad for a wrestling school and gave me the phone number. He suggested that I go there for a "crash course" of the

basics so I would at least have an appearance of knowing what I was doing when I arrived at MCW (Mid-Continental Wrestling, Dale Mann's organization) headquarters. I had nothing to lose, so I made a few calls to Geto's Wrestling School.

Geto's real name was Newton Tattrie. He wrestled with Nicolai Volkoff as one-half of the tag team known as the Mongols. When he answered the telephone, I gave him a quick rundown on what I wanted to do. "Yes, I can help you learn the business. Yes, I can help you learn how to be a manager. Yes, you can start right away."

Everything up to that point was a positive. Yes, yes, yes! Then he hit me with the nuclear bomb. "The cost of the school is $1,000 cash … up front."

I thanked Geto for his time, and hung up. I was 13 days away from my first tour as a professional wrestling manager, and my only knowledge of the

business was that I didn't think it was real, and I wasn't absolutely sure about that.

As the next few days flew by, I seriously considered calling Dale Mann to make some excuse as to why I couldn't make it to the tour. If that had happened, my career in the wrestling business would never have come to pass. Of course, you wouldn't know that because you wouldn't be reading this book, either.

However, quite obviously, something happened that allowed me to keep my date with destiny. Once again, like the U.S. Calvary, Lord Jonathan Boyd came to the rescue. My mama told me that a funny-sounding person had called me from San Antonio, Texas, and wanted me to return his call as soon as possible. When she told me his name, I was in shock! My first thought was, "Maybe he'll be there on the tour to help guide me through it."

Until I had my little adventure in the wrestling

business, I never had any reason to make a long distance call, and I was dismayed to learn that my mother's phone service didn't allow long distance calls to be made. Thank God that Jonathan was good enough to accept a collect call. If he had declined the call, I may have never made it in the wrestling business, so again, thank you Jonathan, and thank God.

When he answered, Jonathan told me he wouldn't be joining me on that particular tour because he had been offered the job as booker for the wrestling office in San Antonio, Texas, a full-time, semi-big-time wrestling organization. When he told me that, I thought I was in deep trouble, but that wasn't the case at all. He gave me some helpful advice.

First, he patiently explained what I needed to know as a manager. Basically, walk out to the ring with whatever wrestler they put me with, stay out of the way, react to the match as if I had a personal stake in the outcome, and most important of all,

don’t distract from the match or get involved in the match in any way, unless I was told to do something by the promoter or the wrestler I was managing.

That was just what I needed. At least I had some idea about what I was doing. Admittedly, it wasn’t a lot, but it was better than nothing.

The other thing he told me was that once my run with Dale Mann was over, I should call him and he’d see if he could get me a job with the San Antonio promotion. That sounded great to me, even though I still didn’t have a clue about what I was getting myself into.

That same afternoon, I went to the Salvation Army Thrift Store and purchased my first "wrestling manager outfit." The end result, which cost a whopping total of slightly under four dollars, truly was a sight to behold.

For 75¢, I purchased a blazer that looked as if it

had recently been retrieved from the bottom of a homeless person's shopping bag. A pair of blue-and-yellow plaid pants, so baggy and long that I had to tailor them meticulously with a number of safety pins, set me back a total of 50¢. An off-white dress shirt that actually fit and didn't look too shopworn (at least, if you ignored the cigarette burns that decorated the front) was only 25¢, as was the much-too-wide (even for the '70s) multi-colored necktie.

The final touch was a very costly (two dollars) pair of white cheerleader boots. They were about one-and-a-half sizes too small for me, but I really thought they set off the outfit, so I bought them. I had to cut off the pom-poms from the back of the boot (I really did) before I could even wear them, but besides the major discomfort of the boots being too small, the heels weren't very tall, so at least they didn't make me look gay.

All in all, I thought I had put together an outstanding outfit that would grab the attention of

the audience.

A few days later, it was time to hit the road. A group from our church was taking a trip to the first town where I was to meet the crew, so my mama set things up for me to go along. For the next month, I traveled with the MCW boys. Everybody seemed to be pleasant enough. However, even though there was nobody in the crew that anybody, including myself, had ever heard of (before or since), I was extremely nervous and intimidated, although compared to the WWE's (World Wrestling Entertainment) crew of today, those guys wouldn't have made good squash-job opponents.

At that time, though, it was as if I was in a van with the world's biggest professional wrestling stars. They all talked in a language that I knew nothing about, using words like kayfabe, babyface, heel. They also talked about juice and potatoes a lot, which confused me since I could tell they weren't talking about what they were going to have for lunch.

Of course, anyone today, who has even a basic knowledge of the inner workings of our business, knows that kayfabe means "be quiet," a babyface is a "good guy," a heel is the "bad guy," juice means blood, and a potato is what you get when your opponent accidentally hits you too hard.

To make a long story short, if that's possible at this point, the first day turned into night, and the time of the show quickly arrived. I was scheduled to go to the ring with a guy named Joe Cagle, who wrestled against a guy whose name doesn't really matter. (In other words, I don't have a clue.)

What a match! At least, I thought so at the time. Those two guys were throwing each other to the turnbuckles and to the ropes. They were calling spots (the next moves) out loud to each other. They were missing each other completely with their punches and dropkicks, but they were still taking big bumps. I truly thought I was seeing, up-close and personal, two masters at work. I thought I was seeing the missed maneuvers because

I was so close to the action. I didn't have any idea that everybody in the building, no matter where they were sitting, could see exactly what I was seeing.

To put it bluntly, Joe had some talent, but the guy he was working with was the sh–s, and as a result, their "match" was an abortion of major proportions.

Joe and the other guy, though, didn't see it that way. Neither did anybody else on the card. When we returned to the dressing room, they hugged, shook hands, and thanked each other for a "great match." Every other wrestler also told them what a great match they had, just before they went out to the ring and had their own 20-minute stink-a-roo!

Please keep in mind. In hindsight, now that I've been around the wrestling business for 29 years, I can see all of this very clearly. At the time, however, I didn't have an inkling. Also, bear in mind that in the real world, guys who make their

living in our profession have a goal of having six to 10-minute matches, getting the most results from doing the least in the ring (for the most part, although there are some notable exceptions), showering, changing clothes, and heading towards the next town. But guys on the low-budget circuit, who travel in a van, sleep in campsites, and cook hotdogs on a portable grill, are a horse of a completely different color. Every match was a marathon, and every show was a 3-hour test of endurance, both for the wrestlers and the spectators.

Looking back now, I realize the reasons why. Those guys weren't making any money, they were very unlikely to ever get into a position to make any money, and they weren't exactly living like kings. The only time they were happy and could get their minds off of their problems was during the 20 to 30 minutes a night when they were in the ring bouncing off of each other. During that brief period of time, all of the rough, hot trips in the beat-up van, all of the take-out food, lukewarm

Kool-Aid, and stale French fries, became worthwhile because, during those few minutes spent in the ring, Joe Blow became Ric Flair, or Harley Race, or Bruno Sammartino (in Joe's own mind, of course). Joe Blow #2 became whoever he wanted to be, too. As the people in the audience yelled, clapped, booed, or did whatever they chose to do, they also got to experience a very small, almost minute, glimpse of the life they dreamed about living, but probably knew they would never achieve. Looking back on those days, it's a bit sad to realize that most of those people, wrestlers and fans alike, never realized their dreams.

On the second night of the tour, once again, I went to the ring with Joe and his opponent. Just so Joe's opponent has a name, if only for the sake of this treatise, we'll call him Bill. Unfortunately, I still hadn't caught on to exactly what I was supposed to do. Now the way I look at it, when Jon Boyd told me I should listen to the promoter and the wrestler I was managing, he should have informed me that,

during the course of a match, the referee will sometimes call out a spot, or pass on some kind of instruction, to the manager.

Not knowing this small, insignificant, tidbit of information wasn't exactly beneficial to my career at this stage, because I didn't understand what the referee meant when he whispered down to me, "The next time Bill hits the ropes on this side, grab his leg and trip him."

The fact that wrestling was a work was slowly beginning to dawn on me, but even so, I was shocked at the suggestion. What was the deal? Did the referee hate this guy and want to see him get hurt? Or did the referee hate me so much that he was setting me up, hoping that Bill would get out of the ring and beat the hell out of me? Perhaps he just wanted Dale Mann to fire me.

I didn't know what was behind his statement, but I did know that I wasn't going to find out. I simply shook my head from side to side and backed a few

steps away from the ring in silent protest.

Of course, as we all realize now, that was supposed to be the move or "spot" in the match to start the "heat," or to begin the part of the match where the wrestler I was managing would begin to dominate the babyface. The babyface, of course, was in on it. Perhaps he even told the referee to have me trip him.

Sure enough, a few seconds later, Bill came hurtling towards the ring ropes. As he bounced off the ropes, he suddenly crashed, face first, to the mat. He then proceeded to jerk, shudder, twitch, and flop, selling the fact that he had taken a fall due to my "interference."

Unfortunately, lo and behold, I was standing 15 feet away from the ring when I "interfered." The people watching laughed and shouted out sympathetic and understanding phrases, such as "Bullsh–!" and "You suck!" Meanwhile, you could see it slowly dawn on Bill that I never did what I

was supposed to do.

While I watched Joe and Bill go through the motions and finish the match, the general idea of what the referee wanted me to do began to dawn on me. When we all got back to the dressing room, somebody got yelled at and cursed out. Unfortunately, it was me! The subsequent browbeating I took in the dressing room was the exact moment of my epiphany.

I now knew how the wrestling business worked!

I still needed to figure out all the intricacies, but at that point, I realized we were all a part of the show. We all had a role to play, and if everybody played their part properly, the match would be successful.

Joe Cagle and Pete Miller both dressed me down for being such a total fu–up. I had exposed myself as not knowing my ass from my elbow. They didn't kick me out, though. They took the time to

talk to me and explain the basics of the business.

I wasn't too upset over the downturn in my fortunes. I figured I had bullsh–ed my way into that situation. I could bullsh– my way into another one, and hopefully, be more successful.

Fortunately, Dale Mann gave me a few more opportunities to work. I still have a newspaper article about me throwing a school cafeteria chair at a high school gym show. The gist of the story was that I broke the chair, and the school officials made me pay for it. I thought that was so cool. I was happy to pay the fine. My name was in the town newspaper!

During the next couple of weeks, I learned the business through osmosis, and by listening to people talk. I learned a lot by making mistakes, then getting bitched out about them. I made mental notes and never repeated the same mistakes twice. Bear in mind that a teenager with nothing to lose, and nothing more to offer than a line of BS, is

either going to succeed beyond his wildest dreams, or fall flat on his face. To me, failure was not an option, so I knew I had better come up with a "Plan B" really quick, or I would find myself back to my normal life of throwing Frisbees, smoking cigarettes, and drinking beer with Stink-Ass and my friends.

Chapter 3
Dr. Lennerd Spazzinsky

I didn't want to call Jonathan Boyd too soon because that would tip him as to what a dismal failure I was as a manager, so I called the only other wrestling-related telephone number I had — Geto's wrestling school. During my limited time with the MCW guys, I overheard them talking about Geto running wrestling shows in Pennsylvania and West Virginia, using local wrestlers and students of his school.

I hadn't told Geto my name when I called the first time, so when I called the second time, I approached him from a different angle. "Hi, Geto. I'm a wrestling manager with just a little bit of experience." (I didn't expand on just how little.) "I'm very interested in working on your

shows."

Thankfully, he showed some interest. "Come by my school and we'll talk. I'll see what you know and help you learn more about the business."

When I asked him what it would cost, he told me he didn't feel right charging me since I had already been trained (as far as he knew, anyway), but he needed somebody to help him with the various jobs that come with promoting a wrestling show. "You can travel to the towns with me and help put up and take down the ring. I also need somebody to put up posters and window cards to publicize upcoming events."

When he asked me if I was interested, I eagerly accepted his offer. I was getting a second opportunity at a career that had come to a screeching halt before it ever got moving.

Nothing really eventful happened during the next few months. I traveled to towns and placed

posters in storefront windows during the week. I went to the shows and put up and dismantled the ring. I managed different wrestlers on the shows. Little by little, slowly, but surely, I actually began to get a grasp of the basics of the business. I was being driven to all the towns for free. I was getting an education in the business at no charge. On poster days and show days, my meals were furnished. And the icing on the cake was that I was paid $75 for each show in which I participated, and I was doing one to two shows each week. For somebody with my background and environment, I was making out like a prostitute on a troop-train.

I never actually wrestled in front of a crowd with Geto's group, but I would wrestle Mighty Moses, a midget wrestler, in the ring Geto had set up in his barn. Geto was training Moses and wanted him to get some experience. I was the closest thing to Moses' size, so Geto put me in the ring with him. As a result, I learned a little about wrestling by proxy.

When I started managing, Geto gave me the name Dr. Lennerd Spazzinsky. Yes, I realize that Leonard is misspelled, but Geto wasn't exactly Daniel Webster when it came to spelling and grammar, so that's how he presented it. He called me Spazzinsky in the hope that the people would yell, "Spaz! Spaz!" at me. That chant would erupt now and then from the audience, but it was never anything major. I think it was too obvious a ploy.

Another good thing about working with Geto was that he actually made a living in the wrestling business, and he made a good one for many years. He knew a lot of people, and the guys in his crew were decent workers, unlike the wannabes in MCW. Several of Geto's guys traveled to WWF TV tapings in Allentown, Pennsylvania, to do jobs: John Gavin (who had moderate success years later in San Antonio with a Road Warrior-type gimmick), T.C. Reynolds, Jimmy Craig Jackson, Red Walsh, Mike Donatelli, and John Martin.

After leaving Geto's promotion, the only guy I ran

into again was Bob White, who I got booked into Memphis as Mighty Goliath. He teamed up with Fred Ottman (who was wrestling as Big Bubba) and they had a short run as the Southern tag team champions. He later became Moondog Splat, teaming with the late Larry Booker (Moondog Spot), and he had a short, uneventful run in the WWF as Cousin Verne when Hillbilly Jim's gimmick was on its last legs.

One day, Bigfoot, one of the local guys who had been talking about wanting to go full time in the business, told us he had sent resumes and glossy photos to every territory in the country, but he had received no replies or offers. Every other guy in the promotion could relate to his story. They hadn't had any luck in their quest to make a living in the wrestling business. If you didn't have TV exposure, the only way you could get booked full time in a territory, was to work through connections. Unfortunately, nobody working for Geto had any connections, so they all agreed that they were unlikely to advance in their career.

I cleared my throat. At that point, I had been in and around the business for about two years, with no real accomplishments to brag about, and I was about to open up my mouth to a bunch of guys who had been working hard and trying to get a break for almost a decade. "I have a connection in a major territory. I can help you get a try-out, if not a starting date."

Everybody had a good laugh at my expense. Here I was, the guy with the least amount of experience, and I was going to get somebody booked. Bigfoot, a lumberjack-type who had long hair, a bushy beard, and the best build of the group, was the most talented guy working for Geto. To put it in plain English, he told me, "You're full of sh–."

He then proceeded to tell me, "I've been working too long, and too hard, to have you make jokes like that. I don't appreciate it."

I repeated my statement. "If you'll give me a chance, I'll see about getting you looked at, but

getting booked is up to you and your ability."

By then, he sensed that I wasn't joking, but maybe just a little deluded. "Give me a few days while I work on it. All I ask is that if you get booked, you'll try to convince the office that I'm ready for a full-time job, too."

Bigfoot was very suspicious, but he agreed, and the next day, I called my "connection," Jonathan Boyd, the booker for Southwest Championship Wrestling in San Antonio, Texas. Jon seemed genuinely glad to hear from me and asked about my progress in the business. I told him my version of "the truth," which was basically the truth with a few of the bad spots cleaned up a little bit, just to save face.

Jon told me the budget in the San Antonio territory didn't extend itself to hiring someone to work strictly as a manager, so he was working as both a wrestler and a manager. On a more positive note, though, he did say that business was starting

to come up, and that once it reached a level where he could afford to pay me, he would be happy to bring me in and give me a job.

I was fine with that. I really didn't feel like I was quite ready yet, anyway. A few more months of experience working for Geto would definitely be a plus.

I then told Jon about Bigfoot, and surprisingly, he was extremely interested. Since 1964, there had been several incarnations of a team called the Sheepherders. The first team to wrestle under that name was Luke Williams and Butch Miller, who introduced the gimmick in New Zealand. When Butch quit the team and moved to Australia, Jonathan took his place.

By this time, however, Butch and Luke were back together as the Sheepherders, but they were wrestling in Puerto Rico. With the original Sheepherders out of the country, Jon decided to create his own team in San Antonio with himself as

one half of the team, but he needed a partner. He told me, "I've been thinking about forming another Sheepherders tag team, but with a bigger, younger guy as my partner. Send me some 8x10 glossies of this Bigfoot guy. If I like his look, I'll have him come down for a tryout."

I didn't want Bigfoot to get his hopes up, only to have his dream die if he was turned down, so I didn't consult him. In 1986, the wrestlers didn't send out video tapes to the wrestling promoters because very few people had VCRs. Instead, they sent 8x10 photos, so I got a few photos from Geto and sent them to the San Antonio wrestling office.

I was genuinely surprised when Jon called me just three days later, raving about Bigfoot's appearance and telling me he had the exact look that he needed. I was even more surprised when he told me there was no time for tryouts. He needed to shoot an angle on television the next Saturday, and he wanted the Sheepherders to be the focus of that angle. He asked me point blank, "Do

you think the bastard is ready for the spot? Your say-so is good enough for me."

Although I was still as green as a pepper tree, I felt like I knew the business well enough to judge talent (to a certain degree, at least), so I gave Bigfoot a thumbs-up recommendation. Boyd told me to call him back once I made sure "Foot" could be there on Saturday, and sent me about the task of informing Foot that he had a starting date on a real, bona fide, TV and house show territory.

I have to admit that I was surprised, but it worked! I kept my word and got the guy booked. Sadly enough, though, business never did come up very much, and I never did get booked in San Antonio. I had several years experience in the business and I still wasn't working for a major territory. However, in a business where the strangest things tend to happen, I was about to find myself in the last place I ever expected to be.

Chapter 4
Francie the Cancer-Dog

With very few options on the table, I struck out on my own. For the next several years, I made occasional shots for Geto, but I also worked for various independent promotions, which, in those days, were known as "outlaws promotions." I did shots for Bulldog Championship Wrestling in Wooster, Ohio, and managed the Wild Road Warrior. I can't remember the names of most of the promoters I worked for, but they included a guy in West Virginia named Sonny something-or-other, the shotgun sheriff in west Pennsylvania, the Kentucky Butcher (not the original) in Kentucky, and Joe Perry in Ohio, Pennsylvania, and West Virginia. Most of the shows, not to mention the promotions, were so insignificant that I don't

really remember much about them.

One day in 1985, while I was sitting in a motel room in "scenic" Beckley, West Virginia, a wrestling program called Polynesian Pacific Championship Wrestling from Hawaii came on the Financial News Network (FNN). I had never seen or heard of the show before, but as I watched it, I was intrigued, to say the least.

The broadcast quality was very good, the commentators were competent and interesting, and the show featured quite a few wrestlers who definitely had very good market value in the wrestling world of the early '80s. Rocky Johnson, Jimmy Snuka, Ron Slinker, Steve Keirn, and a few other talented workers with not as recognizable names, but nevertheless, good box-office value, were featured. What really caught my attention, though, was the fact that for the entire 60-minute broadcast, there were no managers!

When I looked across the room at Joe Perry, my

co-worker in Geto's ring crew, and told him that I would love to call that company to see if they would be interested in a good, little heel manager, he laughed and said, "Sure, and where are you going to get the number? Hawaiian directory assistance?"

I said "Yeah, that's exactly what I'll do, wise-ass," and after looking up the area code, I dialed (808) 555-1212 and asked for the phone number for Polynesian Pacific Championship Wrestling [PPCW]. When the operator gave me the phone number, I don't know who was more shocked — Joe Perry or me.

For the next few seconds, I found myself unsure about what I was going to do. I had the telephone number, but what was I going to say when somebody answered the phone? "Well, I've come this far," I thought to myself, "so why turn back now?"

I really didn't think a random telephone call from

a young nobody would get me anywhere, but it was like getting the phone number of the most beautiful girl at the beer joint. You're afraid to use it because you're afraid she'll just laugh at you and hang up, but on the other hand, you're just as afraid not to use it, because otherwise, you'll never know for sure what might have happened.

I made my decision and dialed the number. After the telephone on the other side of the Pacific Ocean rang several times, an answering machine came on the line. I hung up without leaving a message, but I kept the number, because my interest was peaked.

Later that week, as I returned to the run-down, one-room apartment I was renting in western Pennsylvania, I decided to call the PPCW wrestling office again. A friendship began that day — a friendship that still exists very strongly to this day — as none other than Rocky Johnson answered the phone. During the course of our conversation, he told me the reason there weren't any managers in PPCW was because there was nobody there

with enough experience and nobody who could talk!

By that time, I could honestly promote myself because I had some legitimate experience, and I had a track record of success as a good talker on the mic. "Rocky," I said, "I would really like to come to Hawaii and prove myself as a manager."

"Send me some pictures," he said. "I'll call you back once I've had an opportunity to look them over."

That was exactly what I wanted to hear. Unfortunately, I didn't have any pictures, so I withdrew some of my meager savings and had some 8x10 glossies printed. I hated the name Geto had given me as a manager: Lennerd Spazzinsky. I hated it. I decided to become "Downtown Bruno." The inspiration for my new character name was Tim Reid's character, Downtown Brown, on the TV show, Simon & Simon. I thought that sounded cool. I really wanted to use

my real name, so I eliminated my last name and put "Downtown" in front of my first name.

As soon as the photos were ready, I gambled some more of my bank account in order to send the photos to Rocky by FedEx.

Four days later, the telephone rang. It was Rocky! He told me he liked my pictures and that I could start as soon as I was ready. That was what I had been waiting for. I was finally going to work for a major wrestling organization, and the best part was, I knew I was ready!

Rocky told me to call Lars Anderson, the office manager, on Friday to work out the details. Rocky was leaving to work for Bob Geigel in Kansas City, and he wouldn't be back in Hawaii for a few months, so I needed to get situated with Lars. "Fine," I said. "No problem."

When Friday came, I did as I was told. I called Lars. He wasn't as friendly or as charismatic as

Rocky. He was straight-forward and pleasant, but not exactly what I would call Mr. Personality. He gave me all the details: who would pick me up at the airport when I arrived, where I would be staying (in his spare bedroom at $350 a month), what my duties would be with the company, and what time I would start answering the phones in the office on the morning after I arrived.

"Damn," I thought. I wanted to be a manager. I didn't think the Grand Wizard, Lou Albano, or Fred Blassie had to answer phones or clean up the office when they weren't at ringside. At the same time, I didn't want to spend the rest of my life riding around western Pennsylvania and West Virginia in a ring truck. I wanted my life to count for something, so I resigned myself to do whatever I had to do in order to advance myself. If that meant answering phones and emptying waste baskets, then so be it.

Lars closed by saying, "Your plane ticket will be arriving in a few days. Be sure to call me as soon

as you get it."

In a way, I was excited, but I was also a little let down. I thought this was going to be my big break where I would have an opportunity to become a star. Instead, I saw myself in more or less the same position I was in with Geto's group, only on a larger scale and in a more tropical locale.

My airplane tickets arrived as scheduled and off I went. Well, to be honest, it wasn't exactly that simple. I had never been on a plane before, and I had never been anywhere other than Ohio, Pennsylvania, West Virginia, Washington D.C., and the northern Kentucky and northern Virginia areas. I had passed through Tennessee just about every year on my way to my Grandmama's house in Mississippi, but I had never spent any time there. Traveling was fairly new to me, and a trip to Hawaii was busting my travel cherry in a big, BIG, way!

Lars must have looked long and hard for a

bargain-basement, ultra-super-mega-saver ticket because our flight path took us from Pittsburgh to Chicago, to Los Angeles (and a 6-hour layover), and on to Honolulu. You can imagine how I felt about the trip. You have to understand. I was a guy who thought going from Beckley, West Virginia to Wise, Virginia (94 miles) was a trip of epic proportions. Looking back now, I wish I had taken a cab, or even a bus ride, away from the Los Angeles airport and explored a little during my layover. Instead, I ate, smoked cigarettes, ate a little more, smoked a little more, and finally, in what appeared to me at the time to be 77 lifetimes, it was time to board the flight to Hawaii.

I was eagerly anticipating being around a more professional atmosphere, and I knew it would be a great experience for me. The flight was uneventful and featured no terrorist attacks (a luxury nowadays, but a real plus for me on my virgin flight), and the plane landed on time as scheduled in Honolulu.

After I claimed my checked luggage, I was making my way to the cab stand when a tall, sandy-grey-haired fellow stopped me and asked me if I was Bruno Lauer. I was stunned because I didn't know how he knew who I was, but I managed to stammer, "Yes … Yes, I am."

The fellow was Lars Anderson and he had come to pick me up. He had recognized me from my pictures, which answered my question of how he knew who I was. (Duh.)

Lars lived in a condominium in Hawaii Kai, which was about 45 minutes from the airport, so we had an opportunity to get to know each other during the trip. I also got to know a little bit more about what was expected of me in my service to the company, not all of which I was completely excited about.

He told me I was expected to help set up the ring at the wrestling shows, which nobody had ever mentioned to me in any of our telephone

conversations. That really upset me, because working on rings was one of the main things I had been trying to get away from. I told him that, and he told me he would talk to Lia Maivia the next day about the situation.

Lia was the actual owner of the wrestling company. She was the widow of the late Samoan High Chief Peter Maivia, the mother-in-law of Rocky Johnson, and the grandmother of Dwayne Johnson, who would one day become none other than the Rock.

Lia was not only the owner of the wrestling company, but she was, in no uncertain terms, the boss. I realized that fact within five minutes of walking into the office, which was located in the Pagoda Blue building on Kapiolani Blvd. Lars introduced me to Lia, and then he immediately, in a very sarcastic tone I must say, said, "Bruno tells me he isn't here to set up rings. He's here to be a manager."

She hated me instantly. She didn't say so, but I could tell. Who the hell did I think I was, coming to her island, to her company, and telling her what I would or would not do? I tried in vain to explain to her that I wasn't showing a poor attitude. I simply hadn't been told that I was expected to work on rings, and that I may actually have declined the job if I knew that was one of the requirements. After all the years of backbreaking, tedious, and basically unrewarding labor on the big, square monster, I swore that I never wanted to touch a ring again, unless it was already assembled and ready for combat. I tried to reason with her, but she turned a deaf ear and told Lars to give me my office duties.

Lars rolled his eyes, and without speaking a word, more or less told me that he was on my side. He then told me I was in charge of answering the phone, taking messages, and running any errands he or Mrs. Maivia needed me to run. He and Mrs. Maivia were leaving for a four-day PPCW tour in California, and I was in charge of

the office until they came back.

Wow! What a first day on the job. As an added "bonus," I had Francie to keep me company. What a joy. Francie was a girl, but not a girl like you'd expect. She was a bitch. I mean that in a literal sense. Francie was a female dog, with an added bonus: She had canine cancer, with a seeping, puss-infected sore on her right side, open and on display for all the world to see. And she was in my care for four days, with no other assistance or company. It was just me and Francie the cancer-dog. And to think that I left Geto's little family for a situation like this.

Just as they promised, Lia and Lars left for the airport, and there I was, running the wrestling office in Hawaii. In a way, I felt a strange sense of satisfaction. After all, I had sure come a long way since the night I rode to the fair with Stink-Ass. I used to stand on the street corner and waste hours smoking cigarettes, and now I was in charge of a wrestling office in Honolulu. In my opinion, that

was a pretty big jump.

I had brought my savings with me to Hawaii. I had around $3,000, which was a big amount at that stage in my life, so I had a little money to live on until they returned and I got paid. There was a bar/restaurant on the ground level of the Pagoda Blue. I ate my meals there and drank there at night. At bedtime, I went back up to the office to sleep on the couch, with Francie the cancer-dog whimpering at my side.

What a joy!

No, let me be honest. It sucked. It sucked badly. However, I knew it would get better. At least, I should say, I thought it would get better. For a while, I had a positive attitude and caught a glimpse of some good vibes, but they faded fast.

A day or so after they returned from California, Lars told me we had an interview session

scheduled for the TV show, and we would be doing it at a TV studio in Honolulu. All the featured performers would be doing pre-taped interviews with commentators Dunbar Wakiyama, a very nice, young, Oriental fellow, and Ripper Collins, a 300-pound flaming queen who had wrestled for many years, and who was now the color commentator.

Ripper was a really nice guy and a good stick [microphone] man, so I had no problems with him. However, he was the first in what would become a long line of fags who never attempted to make a move on me. I was starting to get an inferiority complex.

The interview session featured a "Who's Who" of professional wrestling: Lars Anderson, "Superfly" Jimmy Snuka, Kevin Sullivan, Ron Slinker … and one skinny, little bastard named Downtown Bruno.

Basically, Lars produced the interviews, and when it was my turn to do a promo, he said they

hadn't decided exactly who I would be managing, so he just wanted me to make a generic heel interview to establish myself as a mean, little heel on the show, which aired in both Hawaii and on the Financial News Network.

I made what I considered to be one hell of a heel promo. I put myself over, knocked the babyfaces, knocked the islands and the island people, and generally cut loose with the best from my repertoire. By the time I had laid out about five different versions of my promo, which would air on separate broadcasts, everybody was very impressed with my talking. Snuka, Lars, Ripper, and Dunbar all gave me a thumbs up. Lia Maivia, however, was a different matter. For some reason that I couldn't quite figure out, she turned her back to me and refused to even look at me. In Lia Maivia's eyes, I seemed to have moved further down the ladder.

The next morning at eight o'clock, I was back at the office with Lars and Ripper Collins. I also met

Ata Johnson, who was Lia's daughter (a very, very nice, respectable and considerate lady) and Rocky Johnson's wife (and the Rock's mom). Once again, they were all about to leave, while once again, I was to remain behind and take care of the office.

Before he left, Lars said they needed some pictures of wrestlers who were coming in for a big show. He gave me a list of names that included Kevin Sullivan, the Rock 'n' Roll Express, Abdullah the Butcher, and a few others. He then handed me a big stack of wrestling magazines, telling me to go through them and neatly cut out pictures of the guys who were on the list he gave me. They would use the pictures in the newspaper ads, on the posters, and in the arena programs. I told him I would be happy to do it and I got busy with that task.

I spent the entire morning and most of the afternoon meticulously going through the stack of wrestling magazines and carefully cutting out as

many pictures as I could find of the guys on the list. When I had looked through every single magazine, and cut out every possible picture, I decided to take a break and get a bite to eat, so I headed downstairs to the restaurant. I ate a nice lunch, washed it down with a few Diamond Head colas, ate some dessert, and headed back upstairs to the office.

Lia and Ata, who had returned during my absence, were waiting for me. Immediately, Lia started in on me: "If you hate this place so badly, why don't you leave and go back to the mainland? We give you a job to do and you aren't even here when we get back. You talk bad about the island people, you won't work on the ring, and now you don't even do what we tell you. Why don't you just leave the island? You don't belong here."

I tried to explain to her that I had actually done everything I was asked to do, and I was taking my first and only break of the day so that I could eat,

but she wouldn't listen. Ata, thankfully, was very sympathetic, and realized that I had done everything that had been asked of me. She told me that it would be okay and that she would talk to her mother. Ata always took up for me, no matter who was present. She was a very nice lady who was always in my corner.

At that point, Lars walked into the office. He, Ata, and Lia went into a side room. A few minutes later, Lars came out and told me to walk over to a nearby printing shop and pick up some posters that they had ordered. He said we would talk about everything when I got back.

When I returned about 45 minutes later, Lars had me put the posters into the trunk of his car and he drove me to a place called the Pahala Samoan settlement. On our way there, he explained to me that Lia had never before heard an on-air personality talk derogatorily about the island people, and that she considered it the utmost level of disrespect for me to have done so in my

promo. Snuka, Ata, or none of the other island people took it the wrong way since, naturally, it was all a work. A heel has to be a heel, and if a heel is working on the islands, he has to get heat with the islanders. By the same token, if I had been working in Nebraska, I would have insulted farmers. If I went to Texas, cowboys would have been my target. Lars agreed completely, but he explained that Lia was very proud of her heritage, and she would be hard for me to win over. He told me not to worry too much about Lia because he was going to continue talking to her for me.

When we got to the settlement, I felt like the inside of an Oreo cookie. Everybody there was Samoan, except for Lars and myself, and Lars was about to leave me there on my own. He reached into the trunk, then handed me the stack of posters and a roll of tape. "There's fifty posters here. Put one in every store window and display area that you can find. Just ask the management at each establishment for permission before you do. I'll meet you at the Pahala Gym at about six o'clock

where I'll be conducting a training session with some prospective wrestlers. After the session, we'll go get a bite to eat and go home."

Thankfully, nothing eventful happened to me that day. The Samoans were all friendly towards me and nobody gave me a hard time for being the only white guy roaming around in a completely Samoan environment. This immediately distinguishes the Pahala Samoan settlement from south Memphis, incidentally, but that's beside the point.

After making my way to the gym and placing the remaining posters in doorways and windows there, I found Lars and the wrestling class. When I walked in, they were almost finished. I was glad because I was so tired and hungry that I was ready to drop in my tracks. Lars and I ate at a restaurant, bought groceries at a store, and drove back to Hawaii Kai.

The next morning at the office, I was there alone answering the phones when Rocky Johnson

called. I was so glad to hear from him. What a great guy he is. He put me completely at ease by telling me not to worry about Lia. He said she was just very protective of her territory and that she always met new people with a great deal of suspicion. I was happy to hear that Rocky would be there for the big show in a few weeks, and then he would return to Kansas City.

Originally, Rocky wasn't going to return to Hawaii for about three months, but his plans had changed in order for him to participate in the big event. He then asked me if I was staying at the rooming house. I said, "No. Lars is letting me stay with him for $350 a month."

"What?" he shouted. "We have an agreement with the rooming house. They rent efficiency apartments to our crew for $200 a month."

Rocky was really pissed. First of all, he was mad that Lars had taken advantage of a poor, green bastard like me to the tune of 150 bucks a month

more then I should be paying. He then told me that he was extra worried because, in Rocky's words, "Lars is a queer." He was afraid he would try to take advantage of me.

Well, once again, I'm not a homosexual whatsoever, in or out of the closet, but I couldn't really understand why I had been in so many situations in which I was always told that I'd be in jeopardy of being approached sexually by gay members of the wrestling community, and yet, I had never been approached in any way. I had two theories: either the gay "threat" in our business was grossly exaggerated, or I just wasn't very attractive! I still stand by the exaggeration theory because my mama always told me that I was very good looking.

I must admit, Lars never struck me as a homosexual at all, but then again, what did I know? And also, what did I care? Since my first day in the business, I had heard rumors about the prevalence of homosexuals in our business, and not

only did I never see any evidence of blatant, outright homosexuality, I didn't understand it. I mean, think about it. The wrestling business consists primarily of big, rough, mean-looking guys hitting each other with chairs, trash-talking each other, bleeding, sweating, and taking huge bumps in a hard, unforgiving ring. It's not exactly an activity for sissies. I guess figure skating must have a secret group of closet tough guys, huh?

Regardless, even if Lars was gay, he was part of a large and growing group of fags that had absolutely no interest in me, so I was in absolutely no danger of being violated. Well, I was getting fu–ed all right, but only on my rent, not sexually.

Finally, the day of the show arrived. Yes, I helped put up the ring. Yes, I helped set up chairs. No, I didn't complain. And yes, Lia and I were actually getting along a lot better. At least for the moment, things were okay between us.

My mind was constantly trying to figure out how

to get the hell away from Lars' condo and into the rooming house, without getting heat with Lars, but I managed to put it out of my mind that day so I could concentrate on putting my best foot forward on what would actually be the biggest show I had ever participated in yet to date.

It was going to be a really big show. We had a great lineup and a good advance. Two hours before show time, the talent started shuffling in: Kevin Sullivan, Rocky Johnson, Jimmy Snuka, Jerry "The King" Lawler, Mark Lewin, and, of course, none other than the one-and-only … Downtown Bruno!

Rocky, of course, was great, and he really made me feel like a part of the crew. That was the night when he started calling me "Lars' gay lover," something he still calls me to this day! And he does it in such a way that it always brings a smile to my face. Don't ask me why.

I met Kevin Sullivan briefly, but I stayed away

from him as much as I could. I had always heard that he was heavily involved in devil worship, and as a serious Catholic, that was someone and something I wanted to steer completely clear of, no questions asked. Mark Lewin was okay, I guess, for a really fu–ed-up guy (either mentally or on drugs, I didn't attempt to find out). And, of course, Superfly was Superfly. The character you see on television is the person he is in real life. He's the same all the time, on-screen or off.

The guy I met that night who would be a big influence in changing my life was Jerry Lawler. My introduction to him was the first step I ever took towards the first real, bona fide success in my life, and even though there have been times over the years when I could have strangled him, I can never thank him enough for what he's done for me.

If you're reading this, King … thank you.

That night, I managed a guy named Rick

Patterson, who worked with [wrestled] a masked man whose name escapes me, although I'm fairly sure he was from "Parts Unknown." I really played the manager bit to the hilt: distracting the referee so Patterson could cheat, choking the babyface when Patterson had the ref distracted, and antagonizing the people in the audience. I got a good reaction. During my stay in Hawaii, I also managed Superfly Tui and a girl wrestler named Penelope.

When we got to the back after the match, Lawler called me aside and gave me a few tips about what I did, what I didn't do, what I did at the wrong time, what I did too often, what I didn't do enough, etc. That meant a lot to me. After all, Lawler was a legitimate, dyed-in-the-wool, main-event guy. He was the man who made the Memphis territory the legitimate success it truly was at the time, and he was (and still is, I might add) one of the best workers who ever stepped into the ring. Also, Lawler can claim bragging rights to probably having "made" more than 50 percent of

the top WWF stars at that particular time. King Kong Bundy, "Macho Man" Randy Savage, Rick Rude, Ultimate Warrior, Kamala, Hulk Hogan, Brutus "The Piece of Sh–" Beefcake, Jeff Jarrett, Hillbilly Jim, and many others, cut their teeth in the Memphis territory that Lawler and Jerry Jarrett owned.

I sat intently and took in every bit of advice Lawler gave me. I eventually mustered up enough courage to ask him point blank if he could see me as a part of his organization in Memphis. He told me he absolutely believed that I could fit into his territory (which was known at the time as Continental Wrestling Association, or CWA), but the timing wasn't right because Jimmy Hart was the main manager there at the time. Jimmy managed most of the heels, while Tojo Yamamoto managed the rest. Tojo had been a steady second-tier manager in the territory for years. Basically, Jerry Jarrett and Jerry Lawler kept him in the business out of respect to him for his years of loyalty to the company, so there just wasn't a spot

for me right then and there.

Lawler did give me his phone number, and he also gave me the phone number of Randy Hales, the assistant booker. His final piece of advice was for me to stay in Hawaii as long as I was able, and to learn and improve as much as I could. He encouraged me to stay in touch, and when a spot came open, he would give me a shot. I took that as very encouraging news.

Unfortunately, that was the last encouraging news I would receive for quite some time. When Lars Anderson and I returned to Hawaii Kai later that night, he matter-of-factly told me that all the TV programs were in the can, and there wouldn't be any more shows for six weeks. As a result, I wouldn't have any income from the office until the next show. He said he would pay me $100 a week to do some odds and ends around his property. He also had a friend who owned a restaurant in Hawaii Kai, and he promised to see if he could get me a part-time job there cleaning up.

That was the last straw. I really, truly, felt that I was on my way, and I wasn't going to let all of my momentum come to a screeching halt … not after all I'd been through. I didn't say anything to Lars. For the next two weeks, I painted his fence, repaired his deck, washed his car, took out his trash, pulled his weeds, etc. The entire time, I worked in silent resentment and plotted my next move.

Of course, I was faced with a problem. Bear in mind, I was practically as far as one could be from my parents' home in Pennsylvania. For all intents and purposes, I might as well have been on the other side of the world. I had to figure out a way to get there, and I didn't have much time to do that. Swimming to California and hitchhiking the rest of the way was not an option, nor was taking a canoe. Naturally, I had to get a plane ticket, but all I had to my name was the three grand I had managed to put in the bank, and about 250 bucks in my pocket from the work I did for the company in Hawaii.

I didn't want to spend my life savings to support my "wrestling habit," as I had already seen so many people do. I had spent my entire life in extreme poverty, particularly in my childhood. I was so poor as a child that we could never afford to buy new clothes, and being an only child meant no hand-me-downs, so my outfits usually came from Catholic Services and other organizations that existed to help pathetic, little bastards like me.

Basically, the wrestling business was, and will forever be, my escape from poverty. Unlike so many other guys (who are complete idiots from where I stand), I've always been in the business to do what I'm told, take what I'm given, make a living, and save and use my money wisely. I'm not, nor have I ever been, in it for the glory.

I say all of that to explain that I certainly wasn't going to spend $1,750 of my savings on a plane ticket. I had to figure out something. I was desperate to make a real living, and I wanted to get started doing that as quickly as possible.

In desperation, I called my Grandmama in Mississippi. She wasn't rich by any means, but I knew she had a little bit of money put away. She also had connections in and around DeSoto County, Mississippi. I figured if she couldn't help me, she would know somebody who could, and sure enough, I was right. I really didn't like to call on my immediate family for help, at any point in my life, because we weren't very close at all. A lot of fences have been mended and bridges have been repaired since those days, but at that time, we weren't exactly the Brady Bunch.

Of all things, Grandmama managed to work out a deal with the Catholic services. Grandmama lived in western Pennsylvania with my momma and daddy, but she would spend several months a year in DeSoto County, the headquarters of Sacred Heart Southern Missions, a non-profit Catholic organization, helping raise money for the church and its charitable work to aid the poor and helpless. She also managed to become friends with some, for the lack of a better descriptive term,

"outlaw" priests, priests who would use "secret" funds to help drug-addicts, alcoholics, prostitutes, and runaway teens.

That was where I caught my break. Now I wasn't a drug-addict, an alcoholic (yet), or a prostitute. (However, at the level of the wrestling business I was in at the time, my peers and I were prostitutes in a very real sense.) I wasn't a runaway either, although I was still (barely) a teen, so I got a deal.

They had a program that would pay for travel expenses to get runaway teens back to their parents' home, and the deal my dear Grandmama worked out was that I would get a plane ticket from Honolulu to Pennsylvania. As soon as I was in the position to do so, I would make a donation to the charity which paid for my ticket, ironically, in the same amount that the ticket had cost. What this amounted to was that I would pay them back for my ticket, but in a manner that would keep anybody from catching on, so nobody would get in

trouble. I bet the Catholic priests of today wish that type of situation was the biggest trouble they had to face!

Anyway, I was going to get off the islands and back to the mainland. Without a lot of fanfare, I told Lars that I was leaving, and I told him exactly why. I was pleasantly surprised that he understood, and that he wished me the best of luck in the business and in all my future endeavors in the wrestling world. When I told him I wouldn't be leaving for five days, he asked me if I'd mind doing a few tasks for him and the office, such as picking up technical supplies for their TV production, or delivering videotapes to the studio so Dunbar and Ripper could do the voice-overs. I told him I would be happy to help out. And even though I was leaving, they asked me if I would like to do color commentary with them on a few of the matches, which I gladly agreed to do. I really did enjoy that experience.

The next day, Lars generously allowed me the use

of his vehicle, and told me I should go and spend some time at the beach before I left, because it would be a real shame to spend as much time in Hawaii as I had and not having gotten some enjoyment out of it. That night, Lars and I went to a bowling alley in Kapolei, where we rolled a few frames and had a couple of beers.

When we got back to his condo, Lia called. Shockingly enough, she had heard the voiceovers and said she absolutely loved my commentary. She really wanted me to stay, she said, to help out in the office and commentate. I don't know if it was my commentary, my hard work, Rocky and Ata's defense of me, or a combination of all of those factors, but before I left the territory, I had won over Lia Maivia.

Naturally, I couldn't stay because I had other commitments, but I was glad to have earned Lia's approval. She even said the door would be open if I wanted to return when business picked up. I was glad that I didn't have to leave Hawaii with a

negative feeling about my first real wrestling job.

On a side note, a few months after I left Hawaii, I heard that Lars Anderson had done something (I never really found out what it was) which really pissed off the Samoans over there. Several of them took him way up into the mountains and beat him within an inch of his life. I felt bad for him when I heard that, but I also felt a sense of relief that it wasn't me.

I also ran into Lia at a WrestleMania several years ago. She was very cordial to me, but in general, she was still a rotten bitch. She was yelling at people who had no idea who she was: "Where's my chair? I need a chair!" They say leopards never change their spots.

Aloha, Hawaii.

Chapter 5
The Return of Satan

Valemont Heights, Pennsylvania, the setting of my less-than-stellar childhood, was a long, long way from Hawaii Kai. There were a lot of differences, especially in the attitudes of the people, and the long months spent there turned out to be a very pivotal time in my life.

While I was in Valemont Heights, I had an epiphany. When I went out into the streets to unwind, take a walk, get a bite to eat, or whatever, I couldn't help but take notice of the fact that the same guys I used to spend time with–smoking cigarettes, throwing Frisbees, sitting on car hoods, drinking beer, and vomiting–were still spending their time smoking cigarettes, throwing Frisbees, sitting on car hoods, drinking beer, and vomiting. I had never given it a moment's thought before, but I came to the realization that while I was about to

embark on the next segment of my life, those losers were content to just sit in the streets and barely make a living.

Right then and there, my outlook on life changed. I swore to myself that I was never, EVER coming back to live in that place again. I wasn't going to settle for barely getting by and hanging around on the streets. I was going to succeed, survive, and prevail in my chosen profession, the wrestling business. I also vowed that one day, I was going to own a home and property in the only place I ever really loved enough to know that I wanted to be able to call it my home: DeSoto County, Mississippi. Having three grand in the bank and very little in the way of material possessions is a long way from property ownership and self-sufficiency, but determination to never, ever, go back to being poor can give a person the strength he needs to make the journey. That, along with a lot of good teachers and a lot of faith in God.

I didn't have many options. I thought Jimmy Hart was still getting the big push in Tennessee, so an opportunity hadn't yet opened up there for me. In the meantime, I figured I'd make the best of things and continued working the independents. In the fall of 1985, I decided to give my old friend, Jonathan Boyd, a call, just to see if there was anything for me yet in Texas. Unfortunately, their business was so bad that they were mere months away from shutting the doors. Jonathan then told me about a small opposition territory in eastern Canada that had three solid months of shows booked, and they were looking for a referee. If I was interested, he would call the promoter and put in a good word for me.

Referee, huh? I had never refereed before, but I had been around better than five years by that time, and I was sure that I could do it, so I told him, "Yes, please see if you can get me booked."

When I called him back the next day, he told me I had a starting date about three weeks from

then. As I made arrangements for a train trip to Canada (where I would be joining the crew on the prearranged transportation for the tour), I read every magazine and article about wrestling that I could find. I studied them as if I was preparing to apply to Harvard. I wanted to learn everything I possibly could about the business.

I also watched every television wrestling show that aired in the western Pennsylvania area. I didn't watch them just to observe and to learn, but to see places where I could potentially get booked in the future. I saw several of the smaller territories' TV shows, and a couple of the medium to larger-sized shows as well. I saw the Von Erichs' World Class Championship Wrestling program that was taped in Texas, Verne Gagne's American Wrestling Association show from Minneapolis, Minnesota, and a lot of the World Wrestling Federation's All-Star Wrestling programs.

I wasn't kidding myself. I knew that at that stage

in my career, I was light-years away from having enough recognition and experience in the business to get booked with the WWF, but just watching the "Major League of Professional Wrestling" was incentive enough to provide me with enough light at the end of the tunnel to persevere towards my goal.

Ten days before I was going to leave for Canada, while I was watching a WWF show, I saw something on the TV screen that changed the course of my life. After a commercial break, the show came back on. Greg "The Hammer" Valentine walked out onto the set … and who was with him? None other than Jimmy "Mouth of the South" Hart.

"Oh, my God!" I thought. "Hart left Memphis! Jimmy Hart is in New York!"

It was so unexpected that at first, I couldn't believe what my eyes were seeing. Once I realized that my eyes weren't playing a trick on

me, my next thought was, "Memphis has a spot open for a manager. I want that spot!" What I didn't realize was that Hart had left Memphis almost 18 months before.

I knew time was of the essence. I had less than two weeks to put the deal together, or else I was off on a 90-day run in Canada, and then I would be back to scuffling around and looking for a place to hang my hat. I had to get in touch with Lawler immediately, or, as Paul Heyman would say, A-SAP!

If I tried Lawler's number once, I tried it 50 times, and I left a message each and every time, but he never returned my calls. I called Randy Hales, and I got the same result. I called them every 15 minutes for two days. Time was running out, and I had to get the spot before somebody else did.

I gathered up all my pictures, the limited video-tape footage I had, my limited resume, and sent it all to Lawler's house by FedEx. I called a few

more times, left a message each time, and still got no response. Time marched on.

Four days later, I was in a panic. I really wanted that job. No, I really needed that job. I actually thought about getting on a Greyhound bus and heading to Memphis, and then showing up with all my gear at their TV show, hoping I would be given an opportunity to talk to Jerry and, hopefully, get my shot. Thankfully, I didn't have to take those measures because Randy Hales called me.

I didn't discover the truth of the situation until years later, when Lawler told me that Randy didn't call me because they wanted to make me the new Jimmy Hart. He had told Randy to call me so I would quit bugging them. Their plan was to use me for two or three weeks, then fire me and send me home. I must have been a real nuisance, but thank God that I was, because that's how I got my shot. And again, thank God, because it gave me an opportunity to get over and prove that I could do the job.

When Randy gave me a starting date, I was ecstatic. I knew this was the break I had been waiting for all of my life. All I had to do at that point was to get in there and do well, and the rest would come along in due time.

The one, big problem I faced was the fact that this was a real, honest-to-God, big-time, wrestling company, not a fly-by-night carnival circuit that I was used to. They didn't provide bus or van rides to the towns. This was a professional organization, and they employed professionals. Professionals had cars. I was a professional, right? Sure, but I was professional with no car. I didn't tell Randy that, however. Sure, I have a car, and sure, I'll be there on my starting date. "Thanks, Randy. I'll see you in a week. Goodbye."

My first thought after hanging up the phone was that I had to get to the bank. Buying a car wasn't a frivolous use of my savings. It was a solid investment in my future. I had to have a car to get

to Tennessee, and when I got there, I would need it to make the towns.

After some very careful deliberations on my part, I settled on an $800 Ford Granada. A friend of Stink-Ass guaranteed me that it would be as reliable of a car as I could buy for that kind of an investment. I wasn't in any position to argue, mainly because I didn't know anything about cars or engines, so I bought it and drove it to my momma's house.

I did the right thing concerning the Canada tour. I called Dave "The Bearman" McKigney, the promoter, and told him the truth. A full-time job had opened up in the Memphis territory and I was being given an opportunity to take it. He seemed genuinely happy for me, and told me it wasn't a problem because he already had two referees. He had only agreed to take me on the tour as a favor to Jonathan Boyd.

I was shocked. That old Kiwi bastard had really

stuck out his neck for me! I was really grateful. Even though professional wrestling can be found all over our planet, the pro wrestling world is a small one, so I knew that one day, I would see Jonathan again, and when I did, I would be sure to thank him for his help.

This was my time now. I don't know why, but for some reason, I knew I was going to get over.

I was told to be at the WMC-TV 5 television studios on Saturday morning, October 25, 1986, at 8:30 in the morning. The show aired live at eleven o'clock in the morning. I left Valemont Heights, Pennsylvania, on Thursday night at seven o'clock with two suitcases and a carton of cigarettes, and I never looked back. I was off on my 800-mile adventure to "fame and fortune." I was excited, energized, and optimistic about the future.

My positive attitude stayed with me … until I reached Louisville, Kentucky, 480 miles into my adventure, when the transmission in my "reliable"

Ford Granada seized up completely. What a catastrophe. Thank God I had the presence of mind to bring my sizeable life savings with me. I had a little less than $2,000 left to my name at the point in time. Naturally, I had no choice, so I pulled into the La Grange, Kentucky, Gulf service station and paid a complete stranger $600 to repair the transmission. I spent the night at the Days Inn next door to the Gulf station and prayed to Jesus that this wouldn't be another fruitless escapade like the one I had experienced in Hawaii.

In just a little less time than it took for the transmission to be originally invented, my dapper, black Granada was once again road-ready, and early on Friday afternoon, I was once again rolling towards Memphis, Tennessee. I didn't let the setback get me down. I just kept thinking about how well Jimmy Hart had done after he got over in Memphis. Now it was my turn.

When I rolled into the "Bluff City" at 9:30 that night, I started looking for a hotel room, but there

was absolutely nothing available. Nobody had bothered to tell me that the Church of GOD in Christ (COGIC) convention was in town, and that there were no available rooms to be found within 40 miles of Memphis in any direction. I was beginning to wonder what else could go wrong? I had less than twelve hours before I was scheduled to meet with Lawler and Hales, and I had no place to get some sleep and cleaned up. I drove all around the Memphis metropolitan area, stopping at every motel I could find, just hoping to stumble upon one that might have had a last-minute cancellation, but my efforts were to no avail.

With no other place to go, after eating at the Union Avenue Shoney's, and drinking a beer at the Admiral Benbow Hotel (no rooms available) lounge, I drove to the WMC-TV studio parking lot and settled down for the night.

Now, I'm getting off the subject for a minute to throw this in: Bear in mind that at this time, even though I was very close to being broke, and hadn't

yet made any mark in the business, I was willing and able, even anxious, to find a room, no matter the price, and pay for a place to hang my hat for the night. Contrast that to Mick Foley, who, even after he had been the WWF champion, and probably had close to a million dollars in the bank, if not more, would sleep in his car just to avoid paying for a room. I was sleeping in the back seat of my beaten-up, '78 Ford because I couldn't find a room, but he did it simply because he was semi-retarded.

Well, maybe I'm exaggerating. "Semi" may be too generous when describing a guy who has absolutely no talent whatsoever, yet makes a fortune by jumping off high structures and objects, onto low structures and objects. I'm not sure the monetary remuneration he received, no matter how great, is worth the mental and physical damage he did to himself. But regardless, sleeping in your car when you can easily afford to rent a room is definitely a sign of severe mental retardation.

Back to Memphis: I wasn't sleeping in my car because I was too cheap to buy a room. I simply couldn't locate an available room. So, instead of preparing my mind and body with a restful, relaxing night in a hotel room, just twelve hours before my debut on Memphis' highly-rated, live Saturday morning TV show, a very important step in my career, I slept restlessly on the back seat of my junky car.

When the sunrise woke me up about six o'clock the next morning, I drove up the street to the Union Avenue Holiday Inn, and asked if anyone had checked out. I hit the jackpot. A room had just become available. Thank you, Jesus.

Due to the COGIC convention, the hotel had set up 24-hour housekeeping, so the room was clean and ready for a new occupant. With just two-and-a-half hours ahead of me before I had to be at the TV studio, I took a much-needed bath and soaked 800 miles worth of stress out of my dried-up, little body. When I finished, I went to the lobby and

participated in the All-You-Can-Eat breakfast buffet, diving into the presentation and eating until I couldn't hold another bite.

At ten minutes after eight, I left the car at the Holiday Inn and walked across the street to the television station, ready for whatever waited for me. If you think I'm going to tell you how disappointed I was with the events that followed, you'd be wrong. As I walked into the outer lobby, I was buzzed through the security doors by Miss Francis Coggins, a dear lady who would become a wonderful friend during the next 20 years. From the moment I stepped through the doorway of the studio, my life became full and exciting.

The first person I met from the wrestling company was Eddie Marlin. Eddie was the father-in-law of the company owner and promoter, Jerry Jarrett, and the grandfather of current TNA star Jeff Jarrett. As the years went by, we became close friends, but in that original meeting, he was very business-like and to the point. I guess he was

waiting to see if I would prove that I was good enough to be there. I can't fault him for that.

Eddie showed me to the dressing room area, and since I was early, I was the only person there. Picture yourself in my shoes: I'm sitting all by myself in the dressing room of a big-time wrestling company, wondering what was in store for me. I was the poster boy for nervous anxiety.

Ten or 15 minutes later, the crew began to arrive. The first guy to walk in was Tony Falk, the guy I was going to manage (although I didn't know it at the time). Tony, who had been in the wrestling business for about 10 years, had been trained by the Poffo family [Angelo Poffo, Lanny Poffo, and Randy Savage]. One of the big musical groups at the time was Boy George and the Culture Club, so Lawler named him "Boy Tony" and had him doing a drag queen gimmick.

The next guys to make their way into the dressing room were Pat Tanaka, a really good worker who

was small in size, but who had a lot of great, high-flying moves, and Paul Diamond, a good mechanic, but a guy who had absolutely no charisma or facial expression. He also was a real prick by anybody's standards (I'll explain later).

Others followed in rapid succession: Tojo Yamamoto, an elderly, veteran, Japanese performer who was a legend in the area, and who would become almost a mentor to me; Jeff Jarrett, Jerry Jarrett's son and co-owner of the territory, who would later become well known in the WWF as Double J; Billy Travis, a decent guy and an above average worker, who probably would have made it really big in the business if drugs, booze, and "gaying out" with rich, old, homosexuals for money hadn't clouded his judgment; and Tracy Smothers, a good-looking, young, babyface from Springfield, Tennessee, who always gave a good accounting of himself in the ring.

The dressing room slowly filled up with others: Ric McCord, Big Bubba, Goliath, King Cobra,

Jerry Bryant, Lou Winston, Dennis Hall, Miss Dolly (Dennis' wife and valet, who did a Dolly Parton gimmick), Tommy "Wildfire" Rich (a real piece of work), as well as a few other workers, officials, and referees. I didn't realize it at the time, but it was actually a very good crew, and the territory was doing good business at the time.

The final members to arrive were Lawler, Plowboy Frazier (who would later be known in the WWF as Uncle Elmer), and Randy Hales, Lawler's right-hand man. Lawler shook my hand and asked me if I wanted to tape a segment for his Sunday morning sports/wrestling talk show with him. I told him I would love to do that. I thought it was quite an honor to be asked to appear on his show when he didn't know much about me, but on the following night in Forrest City, Arkansas, Randy Hales told me it was Lawler's way of finding out if I could handle myself on the microphone. If I failed miserably on the taped show, he could burn it, and never give me an opportunity to potentially screw up the live show.

Thankfully, I passed the test with flying colors. When it came to doing promos, I had a natural gift of gab. I knew exactly what to say to get heat (just ask Lia Maivia). I knew my role was to talk to get my man over, not myself, and I knew that when I was at ringside, I was there to enhance the match, not draw attention to myself and away from the ring. Somebody should explain this to Paul Heyman.

When I appeared on Lawler's show, I put Boy Tony over, knocked Lawler and the Memphis area, and spouted a lot of "funky like a monkey," "too sweet to be sour," and "man of the hour" type spiel that most '80s era Memphis promos consisted of. Lawler loved it, and told me that if I could work the ringside area as well as I worked the microphone, I would be staying in the Memphis territory for a long time! That was really great news to me, and I decided that I was really going to go all out to impress everybody in charge.

The match on television that morning in which I

was to be involved was Boy Tony versus Tracy Smothers. Both of those guys could go, so I had no doubt that it would be a great match, and it was. During his big comeback, Tracy caught Tony in an airplane spin and "accidentally on purpose," swung Tony's legs into Jerry Vickers, the referee, knocking him senseless. Tracy, of course, didn't notice that the referee was on queer street and covered Tony for the pin. That's when I got involved. I had to be Johnny-on-the-spot to get the finish over. I slid into the ring, "loaded" my boot, stomped Tracy in the head, rolled Tony on top of Tracy, "revived" Jerry Vickers, and rolled back out onto the floor to witness the "groggy" referee count Tracy out — 1-2-3.

Everything went off without a hitch. The heat was there and everyone was satisfied with my performance. As I walked back through the curtain, I could hear commentator Lance Russell tell the TV audience that Downtown Bruno was going to be a "shriveled-up pain in the side" for a lot of the CWA's fan favorites. I loved it. Eddie

Marlin was waiting for me with his hand outstretched. He shook my hand and said, "Welcome aboard."

At that moment, I knew I was really on my way, and I was fired up!

The next night, we had a show at the Civic Center in Forrest City. The main event was Jerry "The King" Lawler versus Boy Tony, with Downtown Bruno at ringside. I had only been with the company for two days and I was already in the main event. On the surface, it seemed like so much, so soon, but after all the stuff I'd put up with over the past several years, it wasn't nearly soon enough.

Lawler sat down in the back and laid out the match with Tony and me. I had been told by several people that Lawler probably had the best psychology of anybody who ever stepped into the ring, so I paid close attention to what he said because I wanted to learn as much from him as I

could. Lawler wanted Tony and me to play the foreign object game in this match. His idea sounded good, but it came off even better.

I brought a set of "brass knucks" to the ring. The "knucks" were actually a rubber ring of some sort that Tony found in his bag and wrapped in tape. After Lawler had gotten the best of Boy Tony for about seven minutes, I pulled out the knucks and handed them to Tony. All this went on behind the back of the referee, who on this night was the great Jerry Calhoun. The people in the audience came unglued. It's hard to explain how "over" Lawler was in the territory at that time, but I would compare his popularity as the sports version of Elvis Presley, and that's no exaggeration. When those eastern Arkansas soybean farmers saw the evil, little bastard hand the "fu–ing faggot" the weapon, you would have thought the world was coming to an end.

The fans screamed, "Jerry! Look out! They got somethin'. He's got a weapon."

When they couldn't get Lawler's attention, they directed their wrath at poor Calhoun. "Ref, you fu–in' idiot. Check the faggot! Look in the faggot's tights, dumbass!"

Now unless you're shooting an angle to turn the referee heel [villain, bad guy], putting the heat on the ref and making him look like a fool isn't something that will bring people back the following week or draw money. Tony and I had to put the heat back on ourselves by "outsmarting."

When Lawler felt like the crowd had reached a fever pitch, he began turning in a circle, silently asking the people if we did, indeed, have a foreign object. People screamed, hollered, cried, wallowed on the floor, stomped their feet, pointed, yelled … well, you get the point.

The crowd reaction prompted the referee to check Tony for the presence of such an object, but as he patted down Falk with the efficiency of a police-academy dropout, Falk slipped me the "knucks." I

put them into my pocket and backed a few steps away from the ring.

If the people were at a fever pitch before, they had now reached the level of a nuclear blast. I supposed I should have been scared when I saw the police stop several people who were rushing towards the ring, each of them intent on attacking me (really!). I didn't even worry when the police formed a human barricade around ringside to protect me. I was too involved in my character to care or think about my physical safety.

The problem was that the people were into our little drama as much, or more, than I was. "Check the little asshole! He's got it! He's got it!"

All of a sudden … wham! A wadded-up popcorn sack hit me solidly in the center of my face. When I looked out into the crowd, I saw two cops dragging what appeared to be a 40-year-old, kicking-and-screaming woman towards the back of the arena. The next thing I heard was Mr. Coffey,

the ring announcer, telling the people to return to their seats. "If you don't stop throwing things and get back to your seats, the match will be stopped." I knew good and well that a demand like that wouldn't go over very well with that bunch.

After Tony and I passed the "knucks" back and forth for almost five minutes, I distracted Calhoun and Tony used them to cold-cock the King. Lawler flew backwards and flopped around on the mat like a fish that had just been pulled from the water. Trust me. When Lawler wants the people to think he's suffering, he can do it.

For the next several minutes, Tony and I took turns beating the crap out of Lawler, while one or the other of us kept Calhoun at bay. Every time Tony would grab Calhoun's attention, I would roll into the ring to kick, stomp, punch, or choke the King. After rolling back out, I would give the people my patented "eat sh–" glare. Our teamwork gave Lawler no time to prepare a defense, much less an opportunity to fight back.

Of course, Jerry Lawler always makes a comeback. For those who aren't aware of it, it's important for you to know that whenever Lawler is about to make a comeback of heroic proportions, there is a tell-tale sign that always precedes that comeback. He reaches up and pulls down the shoulder strap of his Tarzan outfit (wrestling singlet). That action signifies the fact that Lawler is about to go on the warpath, and thus, become unstoppable.

As Boy Tony put the boots into Lawler, the King slowly and methodically used the ring ropes to begin pulling himself to his feet. Each time Tony hit him, Lawler would shake off the blows, until suddenly, he stood straight and tall in mid-ring and gave Tony a glare that would melt the polar ice-cap. As Tony started to walk backwards and beg for mercy, down came the strap … and up came the people! Lawler bumped Tony all over the ring. I jumped up onto the ring apron, expecting Lawler to run over to where I stood and give me a dose of revenge. He ignored me completely, so I just

jumped back down to the floor. In the climactic moment, Lawler body-slammed Tony, gave him his signature ten punches to the head, climbed to the middle rope, and came down onto Tony with his finish … the flying fist. 1-2-3!

There might have been famine, war, destruction, and starvation in all four corners of the universe, but to the people in Forrest City that night, who had just witnessed Lawler defeat the evil drag-queen, all was right with the world.

Tony and I were both very satisfied with the match. More importantly, so was Lawler. However, he pulled me aside and gave me my first lesson in "Pro Wrestling Booking 101."

Lawler explained why he didn't bump me off of the apron when I jumped up to feed him during his comeback. Quite simply, he saw an opportunity to make money with me. To do that, he had to get as much heat on me as possible, and then put me into

a situation where I could potentially get my ass whipped. Hopefully, the people who loved to hate me would pay good money to see that happen. If I started to take bumps for a cheap pop before he pushed me to that level of notoriety, the aura of me getting my ass whipped would be gone, and so would my heat.

I understood why Lawler wanted to protect my gimmick, so I assured him that I would protect the gimmick he gave me. I wouldn't bump for anyone unless Lawler told me to do so.

Things went as planned for the next several months. I managed Boy Tony against all the babyfaces in the territory, and the formula we followed was consistent. I would draw the referee's attention so the heel could cheat. The heel would draw the ref so I could do my dastardly deeds. The only difference between Tony's match with Lawler and his matches with everyone else is that Tony would always win … with my assistance. We didn't work with Jeff Jarrett

because he was programmed in a tag team situation with his partner, Pat Tanaka, but everybody else got beat by the "Downtown Connection."

The method we used to gain our victories was to hit our opponents with a "lead-lined" purse that Tony would bring to the ring. When the bell rang, I would carry it for him. We beat everybody in every town in the territory with the magic purse. Every babyface in the territory took the fall for us, including Tracy Smothers, Brickhouse Brown, Davey Haskins, Ric McCord, John Paul, Pat Tanaka, and Paul Diamond. In the process, I stayed true to my word (and Lawler's wishes) and I never took a bump for anybody.

Then Satan returned to the territory, disguised as a Scottish wrestler (who everybody thought was Australian) named "Superstar" Bill Dundee.

Dundee is a tough guy to describe. He had been a top guy, second only to Lawler, in the Memphis territory since 1975. Bill was a short, muscular,

stocky, tough-as-nails, little bastard, who was built like a fireplug. He was also very obnoxious, smart-mouthed, and he had a severe case of small-man-itis.

Bill had been gone from the Memphis territory since July 14, 1986, when he lost a "loser-leave-town" match to Jerry Lawler. On May 4, 1987, he returned to the territory. When he walked into the Channel 5 dressing room, he immediately launched into his obnoxious tirade. "Tojo, you're still alive?," he hollered out. He continued his meandering through the dressing room. "Travis, you co– sucker. Who are you blowing now? Ha, ha!" "Tony Falk you flabby bastard. You'll be finishing up soon. Boy George is getting played out."

That went on until he turned and laid eyes on me, somebody he had never met before. "Who the fu– are you? Do you think you're gonna be the next Jimmy Hart? Hell. I'll pull your pants down and shave your head in less than three months, and

you'll never be heard from again!"

What a guy. Dundee wasn't booked against Boy Tony that week, so I didn't have to deal with him yet, but I knew that sooner or later, a confrontation was inevitable. Sure enough, the time came a couple of weeks later.

We had a spot show in Somerville, Tennessee on a Friday night. The semi-final event, behind a tag team title match pitting Jeff Jarrett and Pat Tanaka against Tojo's team of Akio Sato and Tarzan Goto (Lawler was off that night), was Superstar Dundee versus Tony Falk.

There was a standard formula for the top matches on spot shows in the Memphis territory — the babyface would go over [win] every time, without exception. That was fine, but Dundee didn't want to just go over. He wanted to beat the heel until he was near death, then beat up the manager. If he thought he could get away with it, he would burn you with a flame thrower. That's just not good

business. If you annihilate the guy you're working with, who are you going to draw money with the following week, and the week after that? Eventually, there won't be anybody with any credibility left to wrestle. Either Dundee didn't see it that way, or he just didn't care. Dundee was for Dundee. Period.

That night in Somerville, Dundee made it his mission to catch me off guard. He rolled out of the ring where I was standing and punched me. Of course, I had to sell it and take a bump, but I didn't like it. Lawler had told me that I shouldn't take bumps, and yet, here I was, in Somerville, Tennessee, taking bumps for Bill Dundee.

On the ride back to Memphis that night, I kept begging Tony Falk to not tell Lawler that I had bumped. "Please, don't tell Lawler. Please, please, please! I'll be more careful in the future. I won't get caught in another situation like that." Tony was a great guy and a good friend, but he was the most job-scared guy I ever met in my

life. He was always worried about losing his job, so I wouldn't put it past him to deflect heat off of himself by switching it over to me!

I didn't have to worry about Tony telling Lawler. The next morning at Memphis TV, Paul Diamond made sure it was the headline in his stooge report. Diamond was a stooge, a sh–disturber, and to be perfectly honest, a no good, motherfu–er. In a shoot interview, Paul's former partner, Pat Tanaka, claims Diamond was run out of the WWF in 1993 for going to Chris Chavis' (Tatanka) house and screwing his wife while Tatanka was on the road. What a guy. What a business.

Anyway, for the first time since I knew him, Lawler was on my case — and in a big way. As soon as I walked into the TV studio office, Lawler reminded me of what he told me. I was supposed to protect my gimmick.

I wasn't a stooge like the no-good, prick Paul

Diamond, so I didn't bury Dundee like I should have. I just said, "Yes, sir," and walked out of the room with my tail between my legs.

Later that night, we were booked at the Fairgrounds Arena in Nashville, a major CWA town that was run weekly on Saturday nights. Once again, it was Dundee versus Falk, but this time, we were the third match from the top of the card. The semi-main was Jarrett and Travis versus the Japs, while Lawler faced Don Bass on top in a bullrope match. We had a great house for a good card and we were getting great response from the crowd.

Once again, I was faced with the possibility of another "situation" rearing its ugly head, but Dundee left me alone that night. He was well aware of the fact that Lawler was watching, and he would find himself in hot water if he went after me again. Dundee had a good match and was disqualified when he threw Tony over the top rope (which was against the rules in those days), during

his comeback.

My sense of security didn't last long, though. On Tuesday night, we were booked in Louisville, Kentucky, the number two town on the CWA circuit, which ran every Tuesday night at the old Louisville Gardens arena. Behind the Monday night show at the Mid-South Coliseum in Memphis, Louisville was the second biggest drawing town in the territory. To give you an example of how business was doing back then (and keep in mind that the average price of a ticket was six dollars), Memphis was holding steady at around $25,000 to $30,000 — every week! I'm only estimating those figures, since I certainly wasn't privy to that information at the time, but I'm pretty sure that I'm accurate.

In Louisville, once again, Bill faced off against Tony Falk. During the match, not only did Bill roll out of the ring and punch me, but he spread-eagled and kicked me, rather stiffly I must say, in my balls — all for a cheap pop. I was so mad, but even

though I knew Lawler would be furious, I sold it again because Louisville was a regular town. I couldn't blame Dundee. Burn me once, shame on you. Burn me twice, shame on me. How could Lawler make any money out of building up to a match where he could bump me if I had already been punched and kicked in the balls?

The next night, we were booked in Evansville, Indiana, our regular Wednesday night town. That was the night I earned Tojo's respect and friendship, and Dundee's hatred.

The main event that night was a six-man tag team match with Dundee, Jeff Jarrett, and Pat Tanaka against Boy Tony and the Japs, with both Tojo and me at ringside. I was determined that this was the night that I would make a stand against the Scottish bastard.

Here's how it went down: The match was a typical six-man tag with two sets of heat. The first set was on Tanaka, who eventually made the hot

tag to Jeff. After a few minutes of furious action, they settled back down and worked, until finally, Dundee tagged in. Dundee worked a while, then tagged out.

Suddenly, I looked up and noticed that Dundee wasn't standing on the ring apron. When I couldn't find him anywhere around the ring, I realized where he was. He was under the ring, crawling towards me, intent on catching me by surprise and bumping me. In the process, he would not only make me look like an idiot, but he would put more heat on me from Lawler. What an asshole. Not only did he not care a whit about my career, but evidently, he didn't care about what was good for business, either. His actions would take away my heat, and since I was being pushed towards a blow-off with Lawler, it would hurt the houses.

I had to think fast. I knew Dundee was getting in position to roll out from under the ring and attack me. I thought, "Fu– it! If he's not working with me, then he's working against me, intentionally, so

I'll do the same thing."

I turned right around and walked back to the dressing room. When I reached the dressing room door, I turned around, just in time to see Dundee come bursting out from under the ring … only nobody was home. Dundee just stood there, looking like an idiot. He looked like even more of an idiot when Tojo whacked him across the back of his head with his kendo stick. There was nothing left for the Superstar to do except crawl back under the ring to the corner where his team stood, but this time, he made the trip with his tail tucked tightly between his legs.

Boy, oh, boy, oh, boy! Dundee didn't take that lightly. When we got back to the dressing room, that little fireplug called me everything but a white man and a child of God. He even threatened to call "Little Man" (Jerry Jarrett's nickname) and have me fired by nine o'clock the next morning. I just sat and took it, but there were two things that Dundee didn't take into account. First of all, I

grew up in a hard, rough environment, and I had a real sharp knife within easy reach. If he had laid an aggressive hand on me, I would have cut him without hesitation. And secondly, I was only doing what the booker, Lawler, had told me to do: protect myself and protect my reputation. To me, that was all of the defense I needed.

I was seething with anger during the entire 300-plus mile trip back to Memphis. I kept thinking that somehow, someday, someway, I would get even. I didn't let that stand in the way of doing business, though. It took some pride-swallowing on my part, but I continued to work with Dundee on a perfunctory basis during the upcoming weeks. My actions worked to my favor because Dundee actually started to treat me with a little bit of respect, and I returned the favor.

Chapter 6
The Insane Kiwi

It's interesting to note that another subject occurred during the same time frame. A new babyface — my old pal Rocky Johnson — was scheduled to start in the territory on the first weekend of April 1987. That was great news because he was another person on what was becoming an expanding list of people on my side.

Lawler was on my side because I did whatever it was he told me to do. Tojo respected my courage for standing up to Dundee by going back to the dressing room in Evansville. And now, my buddy Rocky was going to be there. I was in a pretty good position because I had garnered both respect and friendship with a lot of people, and it didn't hurt that very few people liked Dundee to begin with.

While I was working for the CWA, I lived at a Motel 6 in West Memphis, Arkansas, where I paid a weekly rate of $108. I preferred to live by myself, but when Rocky arrived, we became roommates. On his first night there, we acted like two high school kids on our first overnight sleepover. During the course of our conversation, we decided that since Nashville was the central point of the CWA territory, we would move there and split the expenses down the middle. I loved the idea.

Rocky was a featured babyface and I was the featured heel manager, so we couldn't travel to the towns together, but every night, when we got back to the Alamo Plaza Court in Nashville, we had an all-night beer and Gordon's Gin bust, which often lasted until dawn's early light.

Rocky was (and still is) a great guy, but he loved to "gas" up my head with a bunch of crap, and he took particular pleasure in getting me worked up about Bill Dundee. As you already know, Bill and

I weren't exactly friends, but we were getting along, and we had a certain respect for each other. But Rocky loved to playfully stir the sh–.

One afternoon, before we left for a spot show at the Civic Center in McMinnville, Tennessee, Rocky pulled me aside. In a low, concerned tone of voice, he told me that he had overheard Dundee say that he was going to catch me that night and bump me. Dundee had even gone so far as to say out loud, "To hell with what Lawler wants! Fu– Bruno!"

I was so glad to have Rocky in my corner. However, what I didn't know, was that Rocky had talked to Dundee the night before, telling him that I had said Dundee was too old and slow to ever catch me, and, unless I let him, he wouldn't be able to grab me in a midnight dream.

Now keep these two things in mind: 1) Neither Dundee or I had said any of those things, and, 2) Rocky wasn't trying to hurt me. He was just

having a little warped fun.

Unfortunately, the rib backfired in a big way, and I was the recipient of the heat.

That night, during the tag team match which pitted Dundee and Rocky against Boy Tony and local Nashvillian (and noted alcoholic) Tony Burton, with me at ringside, a track meet broke out, with Dundee and me as the sole participants. Rocky knew what was going on, but nobody else did.

The match came to a standstill as the entire focus of both the fans and the wrestlers shifted to Dundee chasing me through the arena, up the aisles, through the crowd, into the ring, out of the ring, back into the crowd, back into the ring, etc. The only person I remember seeing was Boy Tony, who stood in the middle of the ring, looking on in disbelief as Dundee and I raced through the arena. Keep in mind, I was in my early 20s, so I ran a "good race," but I smoked a pack of Newport cigarettes every day, drank 15 beers a night (at least), and ate

the worst diet imaginable. Dundee, on the other hand, took care of himself by working out, not smoking, and eating healthy food. In a nutshell, it was just a matter of time before I blew up like a balloon and Dundee caught me.

I figured he would slug me, perhaps with a stiffy, but nothing too extreme. I would take a bump and it would be over. Not this time, though. "Too old, huh?," growled Bill. He doubled-hooked my arms and ran me straight into the iron ring post, breaking my collar-bone.

Memo: To the over-paid, under-talented pussies of today, who take off six to eight months when they get a hang-nail because they get paid when they're off:

Quit abusing Vince McMahon's generosity.

If I had used my broken collarbone as an excuse to not work, I wouldn't get paid, so I went back to work the very next day. Today, my neck is in such

bad shape that I can qualify for disability, but I still go to work every day because nobody owes me a thing. In fact, in my opinion, I owe it to my boss (Vince now, Lawler then) to work hard and "earn" my paycheck.

Nowadays, we have guys in the business like Rhyno, who came into the WWE with an average body and so-so work ability. He worked for less than eight months, then laid out for 15 months after having cervical fusion surgery for two herniated discs in his neck. What big bump did Rhyno ever take in the WWE to warrant Vince's paying for the medical treatment? I believe that whatever neck injuries he had were the result of matches he had when he was wrestling for Paul Heyman's bogus ECW promotion.

When I say bogus, that's exactly what I mean. Everybody acts like ECW was a huge deal, when in fact, the interviews were taped in his mother's basement. They hung a sheet from the ceiling so the viewers couldn't see the washing

machine and dryer. He wrote bad checks to talent and promised he would make them good, and, as history shows, he reneged on those promises. He made everybody think ECW was a big success, when in fact, it was a failure. That's just my opinion, but you can't argue with history.

I think Paul got Rhyno booked into New York so Vince would be the scapegoat to pay for Rhyno's surgery. Hey, that's just my opinion, but my neck's all messed up, too, and I'm not trying to get Vince to pay for surgery. And I have 18 years with the WWE.

Screw Rhyno and everybody else who take advantage of our business. Pay your dues like you should.

Anyway, back to Dundee. I didn't hate Dundee for what he did, because if I really ran off at the mouth like he thought I did, I would have deserved a broken bone (at least). I wasn't mad at Rocky, either, because he didn't intend for that to

happen. It was just one of those things that used to happen in our business when ribs were played. I accepted that, not like the six-months-off prima-donna guys in the business today.

I'm not big, muscular, or built like an athlete. I'm not very strong, either, but I can promise you that here in the south, I'm what we call a "true-to-life bad-ass." There are guys at Mugs who will testify to that.

Mugs was a white-trash, redneck-biker-cowboy, beer joint located in the Raleigh section of northeast Memphis. It catered to the lowest class of clientele in Memphis (people like me), and I fit right in with that crowd. I used to gravitate there on my off nights. I was quite a local celebrity in Memphis at the time, so I got the red carpet treatment. Whenever I went in there, people bought me beers (which I accepted), offered me drugs (which I declined), and girls offered themselves (on which I'll plea the Fifth). I enjoyed the hot-shot treatment, but I didn't

anticipate the jealousy and the ultimate violence that it led to. Unfortunately for the unnamed moron that I'm going to tell you about, messing around with me can lead to bad results. (Evil, no-good-bastard Bruce Prichard: please etch this story into your mind.)

One night at Mugs, I was innocently drinking a beer or two (or 20), when a drunken, long-haired, loudmouth started to berate both me and my profession. I told him nicely, but firmly, to watch his mouth. He calmed down for a few minutes, but started up again. This time, I walked over and told him, in no uncertain terms, to leave my name and my profession out of his vocabulary. The tone of my voice let him know that I meant business, and he shut up.

A few minutes later, when I was trying to call a friend of mine on the pay phone near the front door, here comes the moron. He reaches over, takes the receiver out of my hand, and hangs it up in the phone cradle. He looked at me with a silly grin on

his face, then looked over at the ugly crone he was with, and said something to the effect of, "What the hell is a fake wrestling guy going to do to me?"

I answered his question pretty quickly. I yanked the receiver from the pay phone receptacle and swung it into his grinning face. I didn't know it at the time, but I learned later that I shattered his nose, cheek bones, and jaw. His girlfriend (and I use the term "girl" loosely) took him to the hospital, where the doctors had to strip flesh from his ass to reconstruct his facial appearance. I'll bet not a day goes by that Ass-Face doesn't look in the mirror and wish he hadn't messed with "the fake wrestling guy."

I really don't claim to be bad, but as we say here in Mississippi, I pity the dog who tries to take my bone. Or something like that.

The next time I walked into Mugs, the cops were there, waiting to ask me some questions. Evidently, Ass-Face went crying to the

detectives at the Memphis north precinct and gave them a sob story you wouldn't believe. Don't take this literally, but basically, he claimed he was sitting in a corner of the room, reading the Bible, when out of the blue, with a maniacal look in my eyes, I attacked him, completely unprovoked. It was a crock of sh–. The truth was, he thought he would impress his girlfriend by making an example of Downtown Bruno, one of the most recognizable stars in the CWA.

When the detective asked me to go to New Allen Road for interrogation, I went without an argument, but I wasn't happy about it. I was really worried that my career, which was really moving along well (finally), was going to get sidetracked by a six-year stretch in the Shelby County Jail. If I was indicted, I knew Lawler would probably fire me, and I couldn't have blamed him. He had told me many times to stay out of the trashy beer joints.

After I told my side of the story (the truth) to the detective, he told me something I really didn't

want to hear. He was going to present the case to the grand jury to see if it would bring back an indictment. I knew then that I was in trouble. Grand juries always send (by way of the judge) back an indictment. That's what they do.

Thank God that I had friends in low places. Bobby Earwood, the owner of Mugs, had a lot of connections in northeast Memphis, and he wasn't crazy about me getting hung out to dry by a white-trash bastard who was 100 percent in the wrong to begin with. "Big Boy," as Bobby was known to his friends," told me the grand jury wouldn't be in session for another week, and by that time, he would have the situation "fixed." I didn't know how he intended to "fix" the situation, but I didn't intend to ask any questions, either.

The next four days were very nerve wracking for me. Every time I saw a cop, I thought he was coming after me. I went to the towns every night, but due to being preoccupied with my pending indictment, my work suffered.

My attorney, the legendary Bill Massey, eventually contacted me. The grand jury would convene on Monday morning at ten o'clock. He wanted me to report to his office that morning and wait for the detective to call with the results. In a nutshell, Massey told me to expect an indictment and a warrant for my arrest to be issued. If that was the case, we would drive downtown, surrender to the authorities, and show full cooperation. He would then arrange to have Acue Wicks (a very well-connected bail-bondsman in Memphis) get me bonded out while I was being processed into the jail. I was a nervous wreck, but I was all set and ready to go with whatever fate had in store for me.

After what seemed like an eternity, the phone rang. Massey nodded his head to let me know that the caller was the detective. This was it. My life in the wrestling world was over, and my life in the underworld was about to begin.

Or was it?

Massey had a shocked, but happy, expression on his face as he listened to the detective. He kept saying things like, "You gotta be kidding me," and, "Ha-ha. No, I know Bruno didn't have anything to do with that." Bill then handed the phone to me and whispered, "You're gonna be okay."

I was shocked, pleasantly so, but very confused. The detective told me that he had a very scared and frightened young man sitting in his office, who, due to having contracted a sudden case of amnesia, was refusing to testify to the grand jury. It didn't take me long to realize what had happened. Evidently, someone had let Ass-Face know that you don't come into Bobby Earwood's beer joint, pick a fight, get your ass whipped, and then involve the police. There have always been rumors that people were buried behind the old Humco plant in North Memphis for similar actions. Evidently, Ass-Face worried that he might possibly join them if he didn't keep his mouth shut.

The detective told me that I had better steer clear of trouble, or he would come down on me faster than a Klansman through Harlem. I thanked him, thanked Massey, and walked out of Bill's office as a free man.

I immediately drove to Mugs. When I walked in, Big Boy and his crew were sitting at a table. Big Boy smoked like a fire and drank like a fish. He also mumbled, sounding a lot like the cartoon character Boomhauaer on King of the Hill. Big Boy told me that a bounty on Ass-Face had been circulated throughout northeast Memphis, and the bikers, cowboys, and other various types of rogues, were all supposed to do whatever it took to keep him from testifying. I'm not quite sure how far the bounty permitted them to go, or what they did to achieve those ends. To be honest, I didn't want to know.

Putting that incident behind me was such a relief. Now I could get back to important things in my life, such as developing new ways to avoid

Bill Dundee.

Moving back in time a bit, one week after I arrived in the territory, the program pitting Jeff Jarrett and Pat Tanaka against Tojo's Japanese team came to an end, and a new team came into the CWA to work with Jeff and Billy — Jonathan Boyd and Bigfoot! What a small world the wrestling business had turned out to be. Naturally, Jon, Bigfoot, and I had one heck of a hugging, backslapping reunion. It was great. It had been more than seven years since Boyd and I had roomed together. Sadly for Jon, however, I was on my way up the ladder, and he was on his way down. And he didn't take it too well.

Our happy reunion didn't last long. To this day, thinking about the events that followed saddens me, because Jonathan had helped me more than anyone else in the business up to that point. But by this time in his life, he had become bitter.

I immediately began traveling with Jonathan and

Bigfoot. Jon, however, wasn't the same guy I had known seven years previously. He looked as if he had aged at least 20 years during the seven years we had been apart. His attitude had become mean-spirited and abusive (a lot like Bruce Prichard). On trips, even up to 300 miles, Jonathan remained very silent, almost to the point of being catatonic. He would occasionally ramble on incoherently about things that barely made sense, such as why Billy Travis needed to wear different colored tights, or why Jeff Jarrett should change his name. His behavior became so strange that I became apprehensive, and after just one week, I started to travel alone.

One week after Bigfoot and Jonathan arrived, on November 3, 1986, the office put them over Jeff and Billy for the Southern tag team belts. But even in the "glory" of being given the belts, Boyd grew increasingly moody and gloomy, and he acted very odd. One night in the dressing room, he drew a pencil drawing of himself on a piece of notebook paper. He was surrounded by lightning bolts,

space ships, UFO's, aliens (displaying the middle finger), planets, fire, stars, and other science-fiction inspired misfits. He told me he had pictured himself as the ruler of the planet, and everyone else as his servant. For some reason, the way he described it was very disturbing. I really liked Jonathan, and he seemed to like me. He had helped me a great deal. Now, however, it seemed as if he was slowly losing his mind.

To make matters worse for Jon, the office just didn't think the team of Boyd and Foot was getting over, and I don't think Jeff was too happy with Jonathan's habit of not selling anything. Long before he was known as Double J, Jeff was known as "Golden Boy," and by God, you had better sell for the Golden Boy. If not, you had better start looking for another place to work.

I had been around the block for about seven years by that time, so I could see what was happening. My instincts were correct. Just one week later, the office brought in another heel tag

team, Mike Davis and Tommy Lane, the Rock and Roll RPMs, and gave them a win on TV. That was an unusual move since a heel team already held the belts. Naturally, Jeff Jarrett would always be figured into the top babyface tag team spot, so they weren't pushing Mike and Tommy as heels with plans to switch them to babyface and have them work with Boyd and Foot. And they certainly weren't going to switch Boyd and Foot.

The office was going to let Boyd and Foot work a program with Jeff Jarrett and Billy Travis long enough for the RPMs to get hot, then shoot a whole new angle with the RPMs against Jeff and Billy.

Just one week after winning the tag belts, Boyd and Foot dropped the belts in Memphis to Jeff and Billy, and on the following night in Louisville, Randy Hales gave Bigfoot his two-week notice. Possibly out of respect for his time in the business, or maybe for fear that Boyd would rip off his head, Randy gave Boyd an opportunity to continue working in the territory in a singles

spot. They didn't have a singles spot for Foot, and the RPMs now had the tag team spot. I guess loyalty to yourself is first and foremost, so Boyd accepted the arrangement, and Bigfoot had to go.

Unfortunately, that was Bigfoot's last run. He was a good guy, but the office just didn't like him. More than likely, it was probably due to the fact that he wouldn't sell, even though it was because Jonathan told him not to sell. Foot should have realized that Boyd wasn't booking the territory, and you had to sell for the Golden Boy. Neither one of them sold for the Golden Boy, but Boyd was the old-timer, so he stayed, while Bigfoot became a mere footnote in the history of the Memphis territory. It was a little sad. After all, I got the guy booked the first time he ever got booked for a full-time spot, and I had to watch him shuffle through two weeks of charity matches before he finished up.

Sadly, I never saw or heard from Bigfoot again, even now, a full two decades later. I hope he's

done well in whatever he turned to in life.

Lawler gave me my next run, which was to be the manager of the RPMs, in addition to Boy Tony. I now had a tag team main event run on the horizon, since anytime you worked with Jeff and Billy (or Jeff and whoever, for that matter), you were either semi-main event (if Lawler or Dundee were on the card) or on top (if Lawler or Dundee were not there). By that time, I had over $10,000 in the bank, which to me was incredible, and business was good, so I was getting a very good paycheck every week.

Jonathan Boyd, however, wasn't exactly a happy camper. Four weeks after Jon and Foot dropped the straps to Jarrett and Travis, the RPMs and I shot a big angle, and when the dust cleared, we had the belts. And trust me, in those days, having the belts actually meant something. We were on top, and Jon was, basically, on the bottom rung of the ladder of his last run. Jon's partner was gone, and the little 22-year-old pipsqueak that he more or

less brought into the business was getting the push of a lifetime, while he was relegated to wrestling in opening matches with guys like John Paul, Davey Haskins, or Alan West.

Jon's frustration came to a head on the following Saturday night in Nashville. Sunday was an off day (finally!), following 18 straight days of work, so we were all kicking back, drinking a few beers, and looking forward to doing some good business. Boyd, the RPMs, Luke Williams and Butch Miller (the Sheepherders, who would go on to WWF fame as the Bushwhackers in later years), Boy Tony, and I were all hanging out at the RPMs' efficiency apartment at the Days Inn. In the midst of the big angle with Jeff and Billy, the RPMs and I were all doing well in the territory. Boy Tony had been involved in high-profile matches with both Jarrett and Travis, so he was figured in real well, and the Sheeps (Luke and Butch) were in for a few weeks to work a deal with Lawler and Dundee, so they were making money as well.

Only Jonathan was struggling to make a living in the territory. This was apparently eating away at him more than anyone could fathom. Evidently, he resented me more than anyone, presumably because of my comparative youth, and the fact that, at this stage of the game, the student was in a far better position than the teacher.

About midnight, when everyone was really oiled-up with their drink or substance of choice, Jonathan did some things that made me feel extremely uncomfortable. When he started pretending to want to touch my private area through my pants, and when he suggestively licked his finger as if he was — well, you get the point — I took it as a rib. But when he continued in a more aggressive manner, I became more and more unnerved. I attempted to alleviate the situation with humor. "Not tonight, mate. I have a headache," I said. That relieved the tension momentarily as everyone had a pretty good laugh, but Jonathan came back at me with a vengeance.

Mike Davis could sense that Jonathan was really messed up, and that he wasn't going to let up on me, so he took me aside and suggested that I go home. "I'll talk to Jonathan tomorrow when he's sober and see if I can straighten out his attitude a bit."

I agreed and started to leave. Since I was too drunk to drive, I asked Tony for a ride back to the Alamo Plaza. When Tony innocently asked me how I would get my car back the next day, I told him I would get Rocky to drive me back to get it after we woke up. For Jonathan, that was the straw that broke the camel's back. Without warning, he punched me in the mouth, busting my lip wide open. As I collapsed onto the couch, he grabbed my face, hard, and proceeded to squeeze it like a pimple. I don't mind admitting, I was scared to death. Jon was insane! "Rocky's a fu–ing babyface, you son of a bitch," screamed the irate Kiwi. "Don't you have any respect for the business you're in?"

I was too stunned and hurt to argue. I just sat there in a state of shock — bleeding, confused, scared, and angry. Butch and Luke were great, thank goodness, as were the RPMs. Tony was … well, Tony was Tony. He just stood back and said, "Oh, my. Oh, my," several hundred times. Tony had been in the business for several years, and he was a really good worker, but at the end of the day, he was still just a poor, uneducated, bastard from Paducah, Kentucky, and it was never more obvious than in times like this. Luke and Butch grabbed me and walked me to the door, telling me, "Don't worry, mate. We'll sort him out. Go ahead now." At the same time, the RPMs calmed down the irate Kiwi.

I was hurt, both physically and emotionally, and more than a little bit drunk. Mike Davis motioned Tony to take me back to my hotel, while Tommy Lane called Rocky, telling him to expect a drunk, bloody, scrawny redneck to arrive home in a few minutes. When Tony dropped me off, Rocky was waiting on our patio in his robe, like a father

would wait for his son. I was a lucky guy. Rocky was a true friend. "Go to bed, you fu–ing idiot," Rocky said in a fatherly manner. "We'll talk about this tomorrow."

I didn't argue. I needed the sleep. "Good night, Daddy," I drunkenly and painfully slurred. I took a big double-shot of Nyquil and went off to Never Never Land. The next morning, the hangover, coupled with a fat, swollen lip, was more painful than I could possibly describe. I had a set of lips that rivaled those of Mick Jagger. Thank God that it was an off day. I stood up from the bed, took off my clothes, and more or less crawled to the shower.

I stood in the shower with the water running until the hot water ran out. That's tough to do in a motel, but I managed to do it. When the water turned so cold that I just couldn't take it any longer, I crawled out and stumbled into our living area. Rocky was on the phone with his wife, Ata. "Hold on, Ata," said Rocky. "Bruno, quit

parading around naked! Ata, Bruno's half gay, you know."

Rocky had a way of making me laugh even in less than perfect situations, and this was certainly one of them. By the time he hung up the phone, I was dressed and ready to go forage for food. Before I left, Rocky said, "If it's okay with you, my son is going to come stay with us starting next Thursday."

I told him it was fine with me. At that point, all I cared about was what my reputation would be when I walked into the Mid-South Coliseum on the following night. I shouldn't have worried. Butch, Luke, the RPMs, and surprisingly, even Boy Tony, had already told Randy Hales about the events that had transpired. I was delighted to learn that everybody was on my side — even Randy, to a point. When I saw Randy, he walked up and shook my hand, asking me if I was all right. He couldn't resist making a speech, though. He cleared his throat and started to make a point about how trouble usually reared its ugly head every time I

started drinking around other people, and he was right. I promised to tone it down.

Randy then asked me if I would feel more comfortable if the company let Jonathan go. This was a position in which I never imagined I would find myself. I hesitated for a few seconds while I thought it over, then asked Randy if he would arrange a sit-down between Jonathan and me. He said he would take care of it, or at least do his best to arrange it.

About an hour later, he brought us together. After making Jonathan promise that there would be no violence, Randy left us alone in what I must say was a very uncomfortable situation. Thankfully, cooler heads prevailed. The first thing Jonathan did was to extend his hand in friendship, which I accepted.

I sat quietly, letting Jonathan speak first. He looked really bad. His breath smelled like he had been chewing on a piece of cow manure, and his

eyes were yellow-tinted and bloodshot. He started rambling on about how much he loved me, how he did me a favor, how he taught me a lesson that I would never forget, and that he hit me out of love, not hatred. Blah, blah, blah. I was convinced more than ever that Jonathan was a bit off his rocker. When I left the room, no sadder or wiser, I told myself that I would do my best to avoid being around him, and that I would stay away from drinking and socializing with the boys, as it only leads to trouble.

Well, I didn't have to avoid Jonathan for very long. The next week, the opening match at the Mid-South Coliseum was supposed to be Tojo Yamamoto versus Jonathan Boyd in a match billed as a "battle of the brutes," pitting two old-time heels against each other, just to give the fans an interesting opening match.

Tojo was a veritable legend in the Memphis territory. Starting with his debut in 1963, he had been a tremendous draw as a heel wrestler for a

full decade, and had become an even bigger draw as a babyface when he became Jerry Jarrett's tag team partner. In his wrestling days, Tojo was short and stocky, but as wide and thick as the Michelin Man. When he unleashed his barrage of judo chops and clamped the stomach claw (his signature finishing maneuver) onto his opponent, the match was as good as over.

Very few wrestlers had the longevity of Tojo Yamamoto, but by 1987, he was (depending on what source you believe) somewhere between the age of 50 and 60. He was thinner and more drawn-looking than he was during his hey-day. He was also unable to do much more than stand in the middle of the ring and hit his opponent with judo chops. To Jerry Jarrett's credit, in return for Tojo's many years of loyalty to the company, Jerry continued to book him as a manager, a role that required less of him physically. On occasion, however, such as the night we're talking about, Tojo would participate in a gimmick match.

When Tojo was told to go over (win the match), Boyd blew his top! He adamantly refused to put Tojo over (let him win). I'm not sure why Boyd made such an issue out of it. It was the opening match, and many of the fans would still be standing in line at the concession stand, making last minute popcorn and soft drink purchases. It would be a quick, easy, comedy match. All Boyd had to do was glower menacingly and threaten Tojo. Tojo would then threaten Boyd with his Kendo stick. Boyd would retaliate by threatening Tojo with his Kiwi flag and flagpole. Finally, when the referee tried to take away Boyd's flag, Tojo would whack Boyd over the head with the Kendo stick, ditch it, and cover Boyd for the three count.

It was simple. No bumps, no running the ropes, no complicated high spots. The whole affair wouldn't have lasted two minutes, and by the third or fourth match, it would have been completely forgotten. But for reasons known only to Jon, he wouldn't do it, and he quit the CWA on the spot. It would be quite some time before I would see him

again, and I have to admit that I didn't miss him. Not this time.

When Boyd walked out, Randy Hales asked me if I would mind doing a deal with Tojo that night. I agreed without hesitation. As I said, it was simple. It wouldn't hurt my gimmick. It wouldn't hurt Tojo. And it would give the people a bit of entertainment.

Basically, Tojo did what he always did. For about three minutes, he stood in one place and made karate poses, while I pulled off the interesting task of running away from somebody who wasn't chasing me. Finally, like the pesky fly that flies right into the No-Pest Strip, I ran right into Tojo. He grabbed me, but just before he could apply the deadly stomach claw, Boy Tony appeared. As Tony hit the ring, Tojo released me, turned, and judo-chopped Tony. Tony bumped, sold the judo chop, and ran at Tojo for a few more chops, before finally laying down for the claw. The referee called for the bell and declared

the match a no-contest.

Of course, I was back in the dressing room before Tony was in the claw, because I ran away like the no-good, cowardly, little bastard that I was. The three of us did the same deal in Louisville and Evansville on Tuesday and Wednesday.

Chapter 7
Dewey and Uncle Bruno

Thursday was a rare off-day that week, but it was a good day to be off because Rocky's son, Dewey, was due to arrive that afternoon. Quite often, if my guy or team wasn't in the main event, the office would give me a day off on Thursday and/or Friday, which were spot show days. They did it basically to save a payoff, because spot show attendance wasn't predictable like the four regular company towns: Memphis, Louisville, Evansville, and Nashville. The three spot show promoters — Buddy Wayne, Eddie Marlin, and the late, wonderful Christine Jarrett (one of my dearest, most cherished friends in both the business and life in general) didn't like to spend any more than necessary on their spot shows.

This meant Rocky would be booked on both Thursday and Friday night, which left me at the motel with Dewey. Dewey was only 14 years old, but he was already a tall, well-built, muscular, young man. He was a real nice kid, and the two of us became pretty tight in a very short time. He didn't drink, smoke, or use drugs of any kind, but I made up for what he didn't do. I never used dope or drugs of any kind , but it wasn't unusual for me to suck down one-and-a-half packs of Newports a day, along with ten to 15 beers a night. Here I was, the adult figure in Dewey's life when his dad was away. What a shining example I was setting. It didn't take Dewey long to realize that "Uncle Bruno" didn't really care about what he did, and that even though I was 10 years or so older than him, I was basically at the same level (or even lower) of maturity that he was.

Dewey and I were the perfect pair. He loved to drive and I loved to drink. I thought that was a good arrangement. It didn't matter that he was 14 years old and didn't have a driver's license. I

thought he looked old enough to be behind the wheel, and he knew how to drive, so why not?

I loved to hang around the seedy streets of Lower Broadway in downtown Nashville, an area that has since been cleaned up and sanitized, which, in the process, stripped it of its character. Lower Broad was full of various types of prostitutes, junkies, drunks, bums, transvestites, chickenhawks, and a few individuals who fit pretty much all of the categories at the same time. Oh, yeah. Included in that mix of lower forms of humanity were Downtown Bruno and his 14-year-old bodyguard.

Cruising down to Lower Broad was a fairly regular event for Dewey and me. We had a great time and didn't get into any trouble … until one night when we pulled into the motel parking lot after a night out on the town. Rocky had arrived home earlier than we expected. He stared out the window of our room in disbelief when he realized that his son was sitting in the driver's seat of my car, while I sat on the passenger side. Rocky read

us the riot act. He told us to smarten up before we both wound up in jail.

Later that night, "Gambler" Bob Owens came over to have a few drinks with us. He drank all of our beer and most of our gin before 11:30. I've never been a gin man. For that matter, I've never been a big fan of anything other than beer, and I wanted more (I was really out of control by that time in my life). Rocky had already fallen asleep, but before doing so, he had gone through his nightly routine of hiding both his car keys and mine. Bob Owens had passed out on my bed. As I looked around the room, lo and behold, Bob's car keys were right there on the table. "Are you thinking what I'm thinking?" I asked Dewey.

Evidently he was because, a split second later, he was in the driver's seat and I was in the passenger seat. Off we went in Bob Owen's car — without permission, without a driver's license, and without a care in the world.

Our original plan was to drive to the beer store and come right back, but when immaturity, drunkenness, and youthful exuberance come together, things tend to get a bit complicated. "Want to cruise down to Lower Broad real quick before we go back?" asked Dewey.

"What about Bob and your dad?" I asked.

"Man, they're out like a light! They'll never even know we're gone," said Dewey.

Well, that was good enough for me! I lit a cigarette and off we went. I don't know how much time passed, but we ended up parking the car and going into a run-down, redneck, beer joint. Dewey had no problem getting in. He was bigger and more impressive looking than anyone else in the place, regardless of his age. We had a great time. About 2:30 in the morning, we thought it might be a good idea to get back to the hotel. We laughed and joked around all the way back,

bragging to ourselves about how we got away with our little escapade, and how slick we were. We were on top of the world … right up to the time we pulled into the parking lot and saw Rocky and Bob Owens sitting on the patio in front of our room.

If there was ever a time I wish I could have just exploded and died on a moment's notice, that was it. I looked at Dewey, he looked at me, and we both more or less simultaneously said, "We're in real trouble." And we were.

Rocky concentrated on his son, reminded him very loudly and repeatedly that only six hours previous, he had told him to not drive anymore, and here he was, not only driving, but more or less in a stolen car. Bob did a great job of verbally laying me out, too. He placed all the blame squarely on my narrow shoulders, saying I was too old to be so dumb, and that I shouldn't influence Dewey to do such things. That went on for what seemed to be an hour. Bob had sobered up enough by that time to drive, so he left, leaving Dewey and

me with a really pissed-off Rocky Johnson. When we finally got to bed around four o'clock, Rocky had calmed down considerably.

On the following Thursday, Dewey and I came up with what we thought was a great idea. We would return to Lower Broad. I would follow my normal pattern of drinking while we were there, and Dewey would continue to drive, but on the way home, when we were two blocks from the motel, we would pull to the side of the road and we would switch seats. If Rocky happened to be home early, he would see me behind the wheel, and all would be well with the world.

Our plan worked so well on Thursday night that we decided to try it again the next night, but something happened that made the plan impossible. As I sat on a barstool, drinking a beer and talking to Dewey, a raggedy-looking drunk walked over to me. Dewey got up and stood beside me, which he always did if he thought I might be in any kind of danger. I really

appreciated his thoughtfulness and concern for me, and I will never forget it.

The drunk had recognized me from the CWA TV program. "Please let me have some money, Downtown Bruno," he pleaded. "Me and my old lady have been sleeping in our car. We need some money to get a room down at the Biltmore. Please help me."

The Biltmore Hotel was an old, raggedy, decrepit, roach motel that catered to bums and winos for the tune of $60 a week. "I can't help you," I said. "I'm not in the habit of giving away my money."

"Oh, man, please," he moaned. "I really need some money bad!"

I started to sense that he didn't intend to go to the Biltmore. He wanted the money for either alcohol or drugs. "Man, if you'll give me 60 bucks, you can have my car. I'll sell you my car for 60

bucks," he declared.

By that time, I was really beginning to get annoyed. Just as I was about to tell him to leave me alone, Dewey said in a whisper, "Bruno, let's at least go look at the car."

"Okay," I relented. "Lets go."

We followed the drunk outside into the parking lot, watching him as he stopped beside a hunk of metal that barely resembled a car. What an eyesore. It look as if a monstrous spider had spun a web on the windshield. There wasn't a spot on the windshield that didn't have a crack, and most of the center portion was caved in. The passenger side window was a Hefty Trash Bag. The car was dented in places where most cars don't even have places, and there was a huge mound of filthy clothes on the backseat. I was about to turn around and walk away when I heard Dewey ask the guy if the car would start. "Sure, man. See for yourself," said the semi-human individual, as he held out the

keys to Dewey.

I never would have believed it, but the car started right up, and Dewey took it for a test drive around the block. When he got back, he took me to the side, and said, "I've always wanted my own car. Would you please buy it for me?"

He ticked off a whole list of reasons as to why it was a good idea, such as: When he turned 16 and got his license, he would already have a car to drive; he wouldn't have to secretly borrow a car to take me on my midnight escapades; he'd work on it and fix it up real nice; etc. etc. etc. When I finally said, "Okay," you would have thought I had just bought him a brand new Cadillac, instead of a 20-year-old, dilapidated, Ford LTD. I told the guy that we'd take it, but for $40, not $60. He jumped on that 40 bucks like a fly onto a cow turd.

Dewey was now the proud owner of his own vehicle. I told him to drive back to the hotel in front of me, so I could make sure the cops couldn't

get behind him and notice that he didn't have any license tags, among other things. As we pulled away, the drunk started to holler and chase us down the street. Of course, Dewey stalled the car engine at the light, so he didn't have any trouble catching up to us. As he ran up to Dewey's car, I got out to make sure there wasn't any trouble. It wasn't trouble. It was just that the guy had forgotten about Uncle Buster, who was also drunk and passed out on the backseat underneath the mound of filthy clothes. The drunk dragged the groggy bum out of the car, thanked us, and we each went out own way.

I didn't think we were ever going to get back to the motel. Dewey stalled and re-started the engine at every light. That time, however, we actually made it back to the motel before Rocky got home. When Rocky pulled into the parking lot, Dewey and I were sitting in the room watching TV. "Well, I see you two managed to stay out of trouble for a change, huh?" quipped Rocky.

Before Rocky had a chance to sit down, Dewey blurted out, "Dad, Bruno bought me a car!"

"What?"

"Yeah, Dad. Come see it. It's right over there."

He led Rocky to the insult to modern automotive technology, which sat where he had parked it — straddling the line between two parking places. Of course, the car never moved from that spot again. At least, it didn't move until the hotel manager called a wrecker and had it towed to the junkyard.

Looking back on the incident, I didn't regret buying it. I only paid $40 for the hunk of junk, and the look on Rocky Johnson's face when he saw the car was worth more than ten times that amount.

I really did look forward to my days off because I spent them with Dewey. We always had a good time together, and there was a cool fringe benefit to hanging with Dewey. He met a guy who owned

a store within walking distance of our hotel. He really took care of Dewey, giving him free merchandise, which Dewey shared with me. As Dewey explained to me, the guy was a big fan of wrestling, and when Dewey told him who his dad was, the guy marked out. He never would let me go to that wonderful store with him, or introduce me to his generous benefactor, but Dewey could get anything we needed. He came back with cameras, cigarettes (for me, not him), magazines, lunch meat, beer (for me, again), and T-shirts.

Dewey asked me to not tell his dad about the "arrangement" he had with the store-owner, hitting me with the logic that Rocky didn't like Dewey to take advantage of people. I guess Dewey forgot that I graduated from the school of hard knocks with BS, MS, and PHD degrees. Those abbreviations mean bullsh–, more of the same, and piled higher and deeper. I knew exactly what was going on, but acted like I didn't, because I didn't want to get Dewey into trouble. After all, I wasn't about to screw up the free beer and Newports. Of

course, Dewey grew up to become a very moral person and he would never do anything like that again. As a matter of fact, he doesn't have to. He can afford to buy anything in the store. For that matter, he can afford to buy the store.

For those of you who don't already know, my "little" companion would grow up to become one of the most electrifying men in sports entertainment — The Rock.

Nine years later, I got a call from Ann Russo, the assistant to Jim Ross, who was the head of World Wrestling Federation (now World Wrestling Entertainment) talent relations. She asked me if Steve Lombardi, my long-time traveling partner and close friend, and I would pick up a newcomer to the WWF at the airport in Corpus Christi, Texas, and bring him to the arena for his tryout match. Naturally, I agreed to do that. Ann told me the name of the fellow I was to pick up was Dwayne Johnson. I never called him anything but Dewey, but I knew that Dewey's real name was

Dwayne, so I asked Ann if, by any chance, he was Rocky Johnson's son. When she said yes, I could hardly believe it. After more than a decade, I was going to see one of my all-time closest friends.

When I first saw Dwayne (no longer Dewey, a nickname that I learned he never liked, but tolerated), he looked phenomenal. Tall, muscular, and handsome, but with one disturbing feature: a very odd, Q-tip-looking (or maybe pineapple-looking) haircut. I found this very amusing, but since I wasn't exactly a fashion symbol myself, I didn't have any room to throw stones.

We had a wonderful reunion and reaffirmed our long-time bond. We hugged each other with sincerity. It was a real hug, with meaning, I might add. Not the fake hug that has become almost sickeningly common in our business, when people who you don't really like (and who probably don't like you, either) come up to you in the hallways at the arenas and put on a show, acting like they really care. I don't do that, and I try to avoid

people who do that. They are really annoying. Take a note. If you get into the wrestling business, top guys don't like the fake hugs, and you won't get on their good side by doing it.

Dwayne would be having his first match with the WWF on March 10, 1996 on the WWF Superstars TV taping. My friend Steve Lombardi, who was also riding with Dwayne and me, was the long-time ring veteran known as "The Brooklyn Brawler." He was respected as a good, solid worker for many years. Pat Patterson, head WWF agent at that time, knew that Steve would be the best candidate to have a tryout match with young Dwayne.

Many of the guys have reputations of taking advantage of green, inexperienced guys and "eating them up" in the ring, which means not letting them do anything to "shine," or look good, and basically not doing anything to help them advance their career. Barry Horowitz was a prime example of

that type of guy. Barry was very selfish in the ring when he could get away with it. If he were given the match with Dwayne, not only would he have dominated the entire match, but he would have done it in the most boring possible way. Fortunately, however, Barry's name wasn't next to Dwayne's on the lineup that night. It was Steve Lombardi's. Otherwise, the world may never have had the privilege of getting to know "The Rock."

Steve wasn't out of his mind with "glory-itis" (some call it egotism), like so many of the guys in the business were (and are). He knew his job was to make whoever he was working with look as good as possible. Steve and Dwayne sat down together that day in Texas. Steve laid out the basic groundwork of the match, while Dwayne listened intently. I learned later that Dwayne had written down the entire proposed match on a paper napkin, studying it for hours and committing it to memory. Well, his dedication must have helped because the match was really good. Obviously, the

office agreed, because look where my friend, the Rock, is now!

But I'm getting ahead of myself. I'll share more about my experiences with the Rock later. For now, let's move back to the CWA and life in "Lawler-land."

Rocky Johnson and I had a good relationship and friendship. We always took care of each other and watched each other's back. A prime example of that took place one night in Evansville. As I previously mentioned, heels and babyfaces were forbidden to travel together, so Rocky usually rode with other babyfaces, such as Tracy Smothers or Brickhouse Brown, while I usually traveled with Dale Veasey and Barry Horowitz.

One night, on our way to Evansville, I did something that I commonly did, which was stop at a convenience store near the Tennessee state line to buy a quart of beer. Nowadays, I couldn't even dream about having a quart of beer in the middle of

the day. It would make me so sluggish and lazy, and I would continue to drink until I passed out on the couch. But in my early twenties, drinking a quart of beer in the daytime was just something to pass the time on a long trip. One quart of beer, even then, wouldn't get me drunk, or even tipsy.

As we drove along, a car pulled up alongside us. We looked over to see Paul Diamond, who was traveling alone, as usual, since nobody really liked him. He waved, then pressed down the accelerator and drove on at a pretty good clip.

As soon as we walked into the Evansville Coliseum, Randy Hales asked me to come into an office, shutting the door behind us. Now, if you've never seen Randy, you'll have to form a mental picture of him in order to fully appreciate the situation. Randy stood about 6-foot-5, but he probably didn't weigh 150 pounds. He had very long, bony fingers, and a thick head of jet-black hair that looked like a bad hairpiece. He always had a wad of Red Man chewing tobacco in his

jaw, with the juice usually dripping down his chin, onto his shirt, and if he was talking to you, spraying into your face.

Randy was insecure about the way people perceived him, so when Lawler or Little Man weren't there, he never missed an opportunity to let the boys know that he was in charge, and this was one of those occasions that Randy cherished.

As I stood there, Randy prefaced his speech by spitting a disgusting, brown, coagulation of mucus into a cup: "Bruno, as soon as you walked into the building tonight, I could tell that you were drunk. We don't allow that type of behavior here. I won't fire you this time, but you can't work tonight. Just sit back here and think about how dangerous it would be to have you out there drunk. You might hurt somebody, or hit a fan or something, and we can't have that."

"But, Randy," I interrupted. "I'm not drunk. I only had one quart of beer, and that wouldn't affect

me in the least. Two quarts wouldn't even bother me too much. I'm not impaired in any way."

Randy refused to listen and explained that he could tell that I was inebriated. "Bruno, you just admitted that you drank a quart of beer. How could I have known that you were drinking if you didn't appear to be drunk? Maybe it affects you more than you realize. Now go have some coffee and straighten up. Don't let this happen again."

As I walked out of the "principal's office," Paul Diamond approached me. "Wow!" he said. "What did you do to get a closed-door session with Randy?"

"Nothing," I said. "Just mind your own business."

As I said that, the truth hit me like a ton of bricks. When Diamond pulled up beside us on the highway, he must have seen me drinking from the quart bottle before we realized he was there. That was why he took off at warp-speed. He wanted to

beat us to Evansville and get his brownie points with Randy. What a scumbag. That's the only way Randy could have known that I had been drinking. I showed absolutely no signs of being inebriated.

In Randy's defense, however, he was correct in his decision. Whether it was one quart of beer or ten, drinking before work was not acceptable, so I took my one-day suspension like a man and vowed never to drink before work again.

In the dressing area in the old Evansville Coliseum, there was a big, open area where everybody congregated. In that open area, there were six or seven small rooms, each a little bigger than the average bathroom stall, where we could change clothes in privacy. I was sitting in one of those rooms by myself, reading the newspaper. Basically, I was trying to avoid everybody so I didn't have to embarrass myself by having to explain why I was off that night.

As I sat there, I heard one of the other stall doors open, then close. I got quiet and listened to what was being said, just in case it was about me.

It wasn't. It was about my friend, Rocky. Paul Diamond, who was having quite a day for himself by that point, was talking to Randy Hales. I couldn't make out every word of their conversation, but it boiled down to Paul's opinion that Rocky was spending too much of his match-time chasing and working with me, rather than putting in his time inside the ring with his opponent. "There's too much ha-ha going on," Paul insisted.

Paul knew that Rocky and I were close, and I guess he was jealous, because he was close with no one. Not only were Rocky and I very close friends, but we worked well together. Whenever I had Rocky stretched out across the ropes, choking him out, it looked to the fans like I was tearing his head off, but in reality, he was whispering something like, "Bruno, I'll bring a 12-pack back

to the room tonight. Is that enough?"

To which I might respond, "Yeah. We still have seven left from yesterday. Get some milk for the coffee, too."

Then the referee would return, I would strut off like the evil, little bastard that I was supposed to be, and Rocky would act like he was almost unconscious. As much as the people hated me, they loved Rocky all the more.

The best part of working with Rocky is that he was all business, unlike Bill Dundee. Rocky would get within a frog's hair of catching me, but I would always escape, and the more times I escaped, the more the houses came up. We knew that when my bump finally came, it would mean big business. Sure, I had taken a few shots from Superstar, but thankfully, he backed off, so my heat wasn't diminished.

Later that night, I went to Rocky and stooged on

the stooge, so to speak, and told him what Diamond had said. "Just lay back and ignore it," Rocky said. "When the time is right, Diamond will get his."

The time became right the very next week in Louisville. A combination of car trouble, the friendship between Rocky and me, which forced us to break the rules of the CWA, and Paul Diamond's evil, Bruce-Prichard-like ways, opened a can of worms that put events into motion.

Rocky and I went through the same routine every morning. We would wake up around nine o'clock, turn on the coffee, and take turns showering. One of us would then go next door to McDonald's and bring back our daily regimen of Egg McMuffins, hash browns, and orange juice. Rocky would drive to the nearby gym to do his workout, while I did whatever it was I had to do that day: oil change, haircut, dentist, etc. We would meet back at the room at a specified time, determined by whatever time we had to leave for the day's town,

and have lunch together before we left in separate vehicles to go to the same place. (Sounds kind of stupid in retrospect, doesn't it?)

On that one particular Tuesday, I was traveling alone because Barry Horowitz had the night off for personal reasons, and Dale Veasey was traveling with his wife. Rocky was also going solo, but only because he had been given a well-deserved day off the next day. The crew he normally rode with were booked in Evansville and wouldn't be coming back to Nashville, so he had to go alone.

After we ate lunch, Rocky came back to our room, intending to gas up his vehicle in preparation for the trip to Louisville. However, he got no response from the engine whatsoever when he tried to start his car. Click-click-click. Click-click-click. We tried to start it with jumper cables, but to no avail. Obviously, the problem was with the starter, and at 12:30 in the afternoon, and 170 miles away from Louisville, it was a bit late to think about repairs. You lost (and I really

mean lost) an hour going to Louisville, because Nashville was on Central Standard Time, while Louisville was on Eastern, so if you weren't on the road by 1:30, you would be late, and tardiness was frowned upon in the CWA.

Obviously, we didn't have a choice. We had to break the cardinal rule that forbid a heel from traveling with a babyface. After arranging to get Rocky's car towed to a mechanic to be repaired, we got into my car and headed towards Louisville. Truthfully, we didn't parade around together at the gas-stations or restaurants on the way to Louisville. I fueled the car before we left Nashville so we wouldn't have to stop on the way. We kept a very low profile and drove out of town as inconspicuously as possible, and nobody saw us.

Nobody but Paul Diamond.

Somewhere around Elizabethtown, Kentucky, Mr. Stooge himself saw me and Rocky rolling down I-

65. As he passed, he gave us the old "shame on you" routine, rubbing one index finger over the top of the other. He grinned and stepped on the accelerator.

When we arrived in Louisville, we knew the Tuesday Night Stooge Report was going to feature us in bold, neon lights. This time, however, we were prepared. I let Rocky out about three blocks away from the Gardens and he walked to the facility alone, while I pulled into the parking area by myself. I made my way inside, waited for Rocky, and then we marched, together, straight up to Randy Hales.

It was apparent that Diamond had already dropped the dime on us because Randy said he wanted to speak to us about an issue he was concerned about. That was all Rocky had to hear. Before Randy could open his mouth, Rocky said, "Yes, Randy. Me and Bruno rode up here together. We know that no-good snake in the grass Paul Diamond already told you, and I bet you're

going to yell at us before you even know the circumstances, so go ahead and yell. We're ready!"

For a moment, Randy Hales was speechless, but then he started to deliver the same old, worn-out, generic speech about protecting the business and so forth. Rocky stopped him again. "The main event tonight is me and Tony Falk. Lawler and Dundee aren't on the card." (It was a split crew that night, with Lawler, Dundee, and a few others appearing in Harrisburg, Arkansas, 600 miles away) "My car wouldn't start. If I didn't ride with Bruno, I wouldn't have been able to be here, and without a main event, the town would be hurt. I rode with him out of necessity."

And he was absolutely correct. Randy had no counter to Rocky's argument and the matter was closed. He told us to be careful going back to Nashville, and that he would personally drive Rocky a few exits down the road to meet me after the show.

Well, according to Randy, the matter was closed, but not according to Rocky. He immediately headed for the dressing room and confronted Diamond about the stooge-off. Diamond emphatically denied it. I think that made Rocky madder than the actual stooge-off. By denying the allegation, Diamond was actually insulting Rocky's intelligence, and that really pissed off Rocky. Rocky was always the most jovial, care-free, fun-loving guy you could ever meet. There had to be a good reason for him to get mad, and this was the maddest I ever saw Rocky since I've known him.

To his credit, Rocky was business. He didn't beat the hell out of him, which I'm sure he wanted to do (and could have). He just looked straight into Paul Diamond's eyes and said, "Don't you EVER let my name come out of your mouth again, and don't fu– with my friend, Bruno, either, or you'll find out the hard way why you shouldn't."

Period. Exclamation mark.

Rocky walked away and that was the end of it. He took the wind right out of Diamond's sails, and he did it in front of the boys, which ended Diamond's career as a stooge. The word was out, and nobody trusted him again.

End of story.

Chapter 8
The Heyman Kid

By April 1987, I was doing very well in the CWA. I had a sizable savings account and my friend Tojo had set me up with a late-model Lincoln Town Car at a reasonable price through a car dealer in Nashville that was a friend of his. I was the featured heel in the territory, and most of the angles and programs (or "storylines," as we call them today) were centered around me. The heels came in and out of the organization and my management, but I was the mainstay. I was very secure and happy during this time of my career.

Then the blackbird of unhappiness (the distant cousin of the bluebird of happiness) flew into the territory in the form of Paul Heyman. Known as Paul E. Dangerously, Paul was a wisecracking, heel manager, who had a good reputation and knowledge of the business. I had every quality that

he had, and I was over, so my question at the time was, why did we need him? By that time, I had managed every top heel who came through the Memphis territory: Boy Tony, the Rock 'n' Roll RPMs, The Moondogs, Tojo Yamamoto, the Kelly Twins, Man Mountain Link, Goliath, Big Bubba, Pat Tanaka, Mr. X, Paul Diamond, and many others. I had taken big bumps for everybody from Lawler on down the line. Now I was getting some competition?

I immediately went to Lawler to ask him about their plans. I wanted to know if I was going to be phased out and sent packing. I appreciated his honesty, but I didn't really like his answer. He told me they planned to shoot a big angle with Tommy Rich and Austin Idol (as the heel team) against Lawler and Dundee, and to get business really hot, they were going to shave Lawler's head. I thought that was a great idea. Lawler had participated in many "hair versus hair" matches, but he had never lost.

I didn't have a problem with it until he said they needed a new manager to be with Idol and Rich. His justification was that I had been damaged, or at least tarnished, from all the things that had been done to me. What hadn't they done to me? I had been tarred and feathered. I had been hung from the rafters of the Mid-South Coliseum. I had gigged myself [cut with a razor blade] to ribbons. I had dressed up like a woman. I had been stripped to my underwear on a live TV show. I had been painted yellow. My head and beard had both been shaved. Tojo had beaten me with a kendo stick. I had a cake shoved in my face. I had eaten dog food. I had a bucket of water dumped on my head. I had been beaten up by women, midgets, kids, and wrestlers of every description. The only things I hadn't done were shave my ass and walk backwards on my hands.

Lawler stroked my ego by telling me that I was a good hand, and that I didn't have to be concerned for my job, but I was no longer going to be the main event manager. That really made me

mad. After all, whose fault was it that I had been put into those predicaments? I had done everything that I had been asked to do, and the thanks I got for doing those things was a big, fat demotion.

To make matters worse, I didn't like the Heyman kid at all. In my opinion, he was everything that I wasn't — arrogant, uppity, and a spoiled, rich kid. I understood that his dad was a rich lawyer, and he gave a good amount of his money to help Paul E. buy his way into the wrestling business. While I was busting my ass, taking bumps, doing bad jobs, and working with a permanently injured neck, Paul bought a wrestling magazine, put in pictures and articles about people that he wanted to schmooze, and used that as a lever to get in with various promoters and bookers. Why didn't I think of that? Oh, yeah. When I started out, I had one foot in skid row and the other foot on a banana peel, and I was dangerously close to falling. Paul Heyman wasn't so lucky. When I say "lucky," I mean that Paul will never understand the pride and personal

satisfaction which comes from the realization that the road to easy street goes through the gutter. If you start out on Park Avenue, you can never truly appreciate the sacrifices made to get there.

So, naturally, I had a lot of resentment for Mr. Heyman, and he, in turn, gave me a lot of incentive to dislike him. Not only was he rich, but he made sure that everybody knew it. He made up for his lack of humility with extremely obnoxious behavior. It wasn't just me. Very few people liked him, and the few people who did were the same people who liked Paul Diamond. We were both managers, and he was taking my spot (I must emphasize that he didn't steal it; they gave it to him.), so we were at loggerheads from the beginning.

One morning, before Memphis TV, Paul E. walked into the Union Avenue Shoney's as Tony Falk and I ate breakfast. He wasn't there to eat. He had spotted my Lincoln as he drove to Channel 5, so he decided to stop in and antagonize

me. He immediately started to talk about how he and his guys were really on a roll, and how they were going to be featured heavily on the show that morning, and how much business had come up since he had been in the CWA. Blah, blah, blah, blah, blah, ad nauseum. Then, he made the statement that really set me off, and one that has stuck with me to this day: "Bruno, I'll always be a top manager in this business, and you'll always be a sideshow attraction. You'll always have a job, but you'll never be a main event manager."

I was dumbfounded! I had been the top manager in Memphis for several years now, and business was good. I would like to think that I had been a part of that. For once in my life, I was at a loss for words. I had no idea as to how to respond. By the time I had recovered enough to come up with a masterful response along the lines of, "Oh, yeah?," he had stood up and was walking away.

I was so enraged by his audacity. When I walked into the canteen (our dressing area) at the TV

station later that morning, only my Christian upbringing stopped me from pulling a shenanigan on Paul E. like I did with Ass-Face at Mugs. I just sat in the corner of the room, reading the paper and smoking cigarettes, and trying to ignore Paul's constant, obnoxious prattle. When he started to knock my saying, "Mama says it be's that way sometimes," a phrase that I really got over with (and no matter what Paul E. says, I didn't steal if from Iceman Parsons, or anybody else, for that matter), I stood up, threw my newspaper on the floor, and told Paul to go fu– himself. Eddie Marlin stepped in, and in a loud, very official tone, said, "Shut your fu–ing mouth, right now." I was shocked to think that my friend, Eddie Marlin, would talk to me that way, but when I turned to look at him, I realized that he had directed his comment towards Paul E., not me.

I went upstairs and sat in the lobby until it was time for me to do what I was scheduled to do, just to avoid any further confrontation. Eddie followed me and we had a heart to heart

conversation. Eddie told me that he didn't like Paul E., either, because he never paid his dues and thought he knew everything there was to know about the wrestling business. "Ignore him, Bruno," he said. "I'll talk to Paul E. and tell him that you play an important role with the CWA. In the meantime, we all have to get along."

Later that morning, Paul E. walked up to me and stuck out his hand. Being a man, I took his hand in mine and we shook. Paul E's overture made me think that perhaps we could all work together after all.

Later that night, in Fulton, Mississippi, my wrestling bag grew legs and walked away while I was at the ring with Tony Falk. When I got back to the dressing room, I couldn't find it anywhere. Paul E. seemed to be very concerned and pretended to help me look for it. When Paul E. went out for his match, Cleo Reeves (a local wrestler from Turrell, Arkansas) told me Paul had hidden my bag above the lockers in the far corner

of the dressing room. I retrieved it, checked the contents (which were intact), and put it into the trunk of my Lincoln.

I really and truly believe that every man has his breaking point, and if you push somebody hard or long enough, you'll find it. Paul E. had found mine. I'm not a violent person, but I am a little guy with a big temper who will lash out when I think I'm being disrespected. Paul E. doesn't understand just how close he came to needing skin grafts from his ass to repair his face. He should also do everything within his power to locate and thank "Cowboy" Don Bass, who saved his ass. Donny settled me down and made me realize that such a course of action wouldn't exactly endear me to Lawler or Jarrett. Besides, Paul E. wasn't worth my time or trouble.

Dale Veasey, Barry Horowitz, and I decided to deal with Paul E. in another way. We decided to deal with him mentally, in a manner which would do more damage than any severe physical trauma I

might give him.

At the time, Dale was doing a gimmick with his wife, Bambi, as his valet. Bambi was a good looking, really, really, hot young lady. Any man who had an ounce of life left in him would lust after her. If she was in her prime in this day and age, I believe she would be one of the WWE divas. Dale, Barry and I talked her into doing a really deceitful thing, against her will, I must add. We had her call Paul E's room (we were all staying at the same hotel) and invite him down to see her. She made up the excuse that Dale, Barry and I all went out drinking together, and that she was very lonely and needed some company. What's funny about that is; a) Paul E. was down to her room, knocking on the door, almost before she even had the receiver back in the cradle; b) if Paul E. had any sense, he would remember that Dale and Barry didn't drink, and I didn't need company when I went out drinking; and c) Dale, Barry and I were hiding in the bathroom behind the shower curtain.

We all thought Paul E. would walk in and hit on Dale's wife, which, even at her invitation, would be unforgivable. To Paul E's credit, that wasn't the case. He never attempted or alluded to any sexual contact, and I respect him for that. However, he lost that respect just as quickly when he started to demean both Barry and me. He really laid it on thick. "Bruno's played out. I'm the future around of this place … Horowitz takes himself way too seriously and isn't as good as he thinks he is … Bruno stays drunk all the time (alright, alright, that one was true) … Horowitz has huge ears (okay, that one was true, too) and has no look … Horowitz can't work (false) … Bruno doesn't have the right mindset (false)." He tied it all together with a bunch of crap about how great Paul E. himself was.

Surprisingly enough, it was Dale who was the first to step out of the shower. "Rule number one, Paul E … never go to another guy's wife, no matter what the reason."

Paul practically crapped his pants when Dale stepped out. His face turned beet red, and then ghost white, in rapid succession. Then Barry stepped out. "Yes, Paul. I heard everything you said … with my big ears!"

Paul's next transformation was to shrink to about two inches tall. When I walked out, he recovered quickly, and a mean look came over his face. "I'll get you for this, Bruno."

Why didn't he say that to Dale Veasey or Barry Horowitz? Oh, yeah, because they were big, stout wrestlers, while I was just a little dried-up manager with a drinking problem. He thought he could demean me and get away with it, but he didn't realize how much he had underestimated me.

Paul E. turned and left the room, which was the smartest move he could have made. Dale was upset that Paul had even come to the room, Barry's (big) ears had turned a bright shade of red, and I was just drunk.

I won't elaborate on it yet, but at this point in my story, I'd like to say that my drinking was becoming more and more of a problem.

Bambi was almost in tears. She felt really badly about being a part of the whole setup, and told us all to lighten up on Paul E. We did what she asked, and in a way, we all became friends and started to get along. I didn't hate or hold a grudge against Paul E. for several reasons. First of all, he gained my respect by not making a move on Bambi, who really was a knockout. That took a lot of willpower and character. In hindsight, I also have to agree that Horowitz did take himself too seriously, and he did have huge, Dumbo the Elephant-like ears. And if he thought I was the sh–s, it was his opinion, and he was entitled to it. He never knocked my drive, my heritage, or my momma, so I gave him a pass. Life went on.

As foretold, Paul E. became the top manager, while I was relegated to managing Boy Tony in mid-card matches against guys like Alan West,

Bucky Siegler, and other guys who worked on the lower end of the card.

One night in Blytheville, Arkansas, I got some bad news. Tony Falk told me that Randy Hales had just given him his two-week notice. I couldn't believe it. Tony was my main guy. I was also managing the Moondogs, but they weren't exactly happy in the territory, and I knew they were thinking about quitting. When I went to Randy and asked him to rescind the notice, he said, "No. Tony has been played out, and it's time for him to move on."

Where did my stroke go? My request to keep Tony on the roster had fallen on deaf ears. Randy had said "no" in no uncertain terms. I was crushed. "Thanks, anyway, Randy," I said, and I walked out.

A new guy was making his debut in Blytheville that night. It was the first time I had seen him. His name was Sid Eudy, a huge, powerful, impressive

guy, from West Memphis, Arkansas. I couldn't believe his look and presence. He was close to seven feet tall and he was built like a Greek God from head to toe. His facial features looked as if they had been chiseled from granite and he had the most intense stare you ever saw. Sid walked over to me and said, "I couldn't help but overhear your attempt to save Tony Falk's job. I respect you for looking out for somebody other than just yourself."

I'm somewhat ashamed to admit that it wasn't just Tony I was concerned with. It was me. I wanted to continue to manage Tony. We were comfortable together, and we had a good relationship, but more than that, I honestly didn't know where Tony would go to find work.

I told Sid that I appreciated what he said, and that I honestly thought he had a look and a persona that would make him a rich man one day. I was right. Sid, who was wrestling as Sid Steele, later became Sid Justice, and still later, wrestled as Sid Vicious and Sycho Sid. He would become a big

star for both WCW and the WWF. At that time, however, he was just starting out. He had a full-time job in construction and was only working part-time for the CWA. I took his phone number and told him that if I could ever help him, I would give him a call.

That night, Tony Falk and I traveled back to Nashville, and I almost (but not quite) felt guilty for asking him to drive. In fact, when Big Bubba asked us for a ride back to Nashville, I almost asked him to drive, but before I could ask, Bubba got into the front, passenger seat, and laid his head against the window to sleep. Tony sat in the back and (very understandably) brooded. I resigned myself to the driving, got a 6-pack of beer, a pack of smokes, an Arby's sandwich, and got behind the wheel.

It didn't take long for Bubba to fall asleep, and Tony was quick to follow Bubba's lead. After an hour or so of quiet driving on Interstate 40, a combination of too many Newports and a swig of

beer going down the wrong pipe sent me into a coughing fit. I lost control of the car and swerved down into the median. When Tony woke up, he saw that the car was about to roll back onto the road, but on the opposite side of the highway and into oncoming traffic. Tony screamed (in the way that only Tony Falk can), "Bubba! Grab the fu–in' wheel!"

Thank God he did, or we would have been dead. After we stopped the car, Bubba made me pull over and he got into the driver's seat. That was an example of how the "drinking behind the wheel" was beginning to cause me problems. Unfortunately, as I'll explain later, it wasn't an isolated example.

Two hours later, we were all in Nashville in one piece. The next day, which was a Sunday, I decided to take some action to improve my life. No, I didn't quit drinking. I took action to advance my career. I had heard through the grapevine that the Continental Wrestling

Federation (CWF) in Alabama was in search of a good heel manager. I didn't agree with Lawler's call at the time when Paul E. came into the territory, but by that time, I realized that perhaps I was, after all, getting burned out in Memphis. I thought the time was right to make a call, and maybe a move. I talked it over with Rocky Johnson, who told me that if I could get a fresh run going in Alabama, I should go for it. He told me I should call Ronnie West and he gave me his phone number. That telephone call would prove to be the downfall of my long run in Memphis.

Ronnie was the Randy Hales of the Alabama territory. Ron and Robert Fuller owned the CWF territory, and Ronnie was their assistant and office manager. When I asked Ronnie if he had any openings for me in Alabama, he told me, "I'll check with Ron and Robert. Call me back in a few days and I'll let you know."

"Okay." I was satisfied. I had set the ball in motion, and in a few days, I would know whether

or not Alabama was an option. What I didn't know was that Ronnie West was going to put the screw to me. I still don't know whether or not he did it with an intent to harm me, but his actions caused me a lot of problems.

As soon as he hung up the phone, he called Bill Dundee, and played the "concerned friend of the Memphis territory" role. He told him I was trying to leave the Memphis territory for reasons unbeknownst to him, and with that being the case, for Bill to be sure to tell Jarrett and Lawler to avoid figuring me into things too heavily.

Thanks, Ronnie. I don't know what Ronnie's motive was, but it marked the beginning of the end for my run in the CWA. By the next night (Monday), Dundee had already stirred the pot by calling Randy Hales and telling him about me and my call to Alabama. Randy called me into his office at the Mid-South Coliseum and asked me about the situation. I shot straight with him. "Randy," I said, "Y'all brought me in here

and pushed the fire out of me. I did whatever I was told, and I got over. The thanks I got was for you to bring in Paul E., put him over me, and expect me to sit back and accept it. What would you do if you were in my shoes?"

Randy told me that if I would give my word to stay for the time being, he would talk to Lawler and Little Man and find a better spot for me. I told Randy I would do what he asked, and I meant it. That is, I meant it until Rocky Johnson told me that I was going to get my notice.

The reason why the office was going to give me my notice?

For trying to leave.

Rocky heard it in confidence from Dundee, who had perpetuated the whole scenario. Rocky, a friend in the truest sense, always put friendship before secrets, and gave me the heads-up. With the writing spelled out clearly on the wall, I got

busy. I called Ronnie West, and played "Tom Prichard." Or, should I say, played dumb. (Same thing, right?) Tom Prichard is probably the dumbest guy I've ever met in my 29-plus years in the wrestling business, but that's also another story for later on.

Anyway, I called Ronnie and played dumb about what he did to me. I once again asked him if he had a spot for me in Alabama. He started with the standard BS about how the territory was going through changes, and the Fullers weren't sure where I'd fit in, and so forth and so on. I just said thanks, hung up, and called Bob Geigel's office in Kansas City, Missouri. Bingo! Bob had actually been trying to get my phone number, which was encouraging. I was ready to talk business. I was a (semi) veteran now, and I was ready to advance myself by going to Kansas City and working for the National Wrestling Alliance (NWA). Bob Geigel was the president of the NWA and the owner/promoter of the Kansas City territory. Kansas City was the last bastion of the

NWA, but Geigel was still the president, and they were looking for me, so I liked the sound of the situation. "Hustler" Rip Rogers was the booker there, and he called me back about 20 minutes later to reinforce the fact that they really, definitely wanted me in their territory. When he asked me when I could start, I told him that I wanted to give at least a three-week notice to the CWA office. I wanted to do the right thing.

Rip told me that was fine. The next night, in Louisville, lo and behold, Randy Hales called me into his office. Little did he know that I was one up on him. "Wrestling is a funny business, Bruno," Randy started.

I immediately interrupted and took the wind out of his sails: "Yes, Randy, it is, and what's really funny is that after all this time, I can't believe that I finally have to give you my notice. I never thought this day would come."

Randy didn't know how to respond. He wasn't

much for ad-libbing. He had his rehearsed speech to dump me all worked out, and when I took away his little pop, he found himself at a loss for words. I'm sure I really caught him as off guard as he had ever been in his life, and I loved it. I knew Randy was about to give me my walking papers, but now that I told him I wanted to leave, he actually tried to convince me to stay! It was just like déjà vu, taking me back to my roots in Hawaii. In Hawaii, however, I knew Lia was sincere. Randy, on the other hand, had been ready to bounce me out, but he didn't want me to quit. He wanted to be the one to let me go, and if it meant keeping me on for another month before he could fire me, then he was willing to do just that. But I wouldn't let him. I told him to please give a finishing date so I could go to Kansas City. I also told him I would do anything they asked in the meantime, except bleed (I didn't want to go into a new territory with fresh, gruesome scars) or get my head shaved (no explanation necessary), and I walked out of the room with a strange sense of satisfaction.

Paul E. left the CWA before I did. He had refused to take bumps or get color (bleed), which really put the office in a position where they needed me to stay, but it was too late. They were stuck with Nate "The Rat" Whitlock, a shifty manager who actually made Paul E. and Tojo look good. I had made my decision, but I loved the Memphis territory and vowed to return, especially since I hadn't given up my dream of owning property in Mississippi. I intended to settle and live there for the rest of my life, but at that point in time, I had to move on to greener pastures.

I lingered around for about two-and-a-half weeks, doing jobs for girls and midgets, and basically, just putting in my time. It was a sad ending to a great run. Bill Dundee had screwed me, and he knew that he had, but to his credit, he looked me in the eye and admitted it. He even smiled about it. "Be careful who you call, mate," he told me.

"I'll keep that in mind, Bill," I responded.

Most guys just go through the motions during their final week in a territory, but I wanted to do business, and I wanted to do it right. And to the office's credit, they let me go out with a bang, and not just let me fade away. On August 31, 1987, I went out in a main event that drew a big house at the Mid-South Coliseum.

Attention: Paul E. I went out in the main event. You were just gone.

The match was Jerry Lawler versus Don Bass in a steel cage match, with the stipulations that if Don Bass lost, he would get his head shaved, and Downtown Bruno would be barred from the CWA for an entire year.

The house was great, almost $30,000, and the match was phenomenal. The finish was even better. Don Bass did his "singing cowboy" gimmick, in which he would bring his guitar to the ring and smash it over his opponent's head while the referee was distracted. Donny had never been

beaten during this run, and now, in the blowoff main event in a steel cage, Lawler and Bass had battered each other onto Queer Street, and both were trying to regain their composure. The referee also had been knocked down into a temporary state of oblivion. That's when I took the initiative (actually, it was the finish) to climb up the side of the cage, toss the guitar to my "evil" henchman, Don Bass, and encourage him to use it to finish off the King. As fate would have it, Lawler intercepted the guitar and clocked Donny with it. Miraculously, the ref recovered and, with the practically sold-out house counting in unison, counted the big 1-2-3!

Bass got his head shaved, but, not to brag, what really took the house to a fever pitch was that the little bastard the fans really loved to hate had to leave the territory! In a way, I think they secretly hated to see me go, because they really loved to curse me out and enjoyed my responses, but that was the last time they would see me for quite a while.

As I prepared to leave the Coliseum that night, I cried. I really cried. That was my home, and I never thought about it that way until it was time to leave. As I was leaving the Coliseum, I saw Nate Whitlock, who was up to his shoulders in Lawler's ass at that point. I just said, "Good luck. You'll never get over like me." (I learned that from Paul E.) With that cocky statement, I turned and left the building.

Chapter 9
Selective Retardation

Three days before I had to be in Kansas City, I began taking care of the last-minute details of my move. I had goodbyes and thank-yous to say to a lot of people who deserved them, especially Jerry Lawler. You can think what you like about Lawler demoting me in favor of Paul Heyman, but he paid me well, and he used me really well for quite a long time. He also taught me a lot about the business. He made my career with that run, and I appreciate that.

I also called Jerry Jarrett's mother, Christine "Teeny" Jarrett, to thank her profusely for her kindness and wonderful treatment. Teeny was a good person and a dear friend who reminded me very much of my mama. She didn't swear or use profanity, and she wouldn't tolerate its use in her presence.

One night at the old Municipal Auditorium in Nashville, when we were doing our ill-advised ESPN tapings with the World Class and AWA guys, a wrestler named Steve Cox got upset about something. He banged his head against the back stage garage door and started repeating "mother fu–er" and "god–mnit" over and over. Teeny told him in no uncertain terms that "we don't put up with that kind of talk in our dressing rooms." She meant it, too. To Steve's credit, he apologized and treated her respectfully.

One of the great memories of Tojo that I'll always cherish also happened in Nashville, this time at the Fairgrounds Arena. Tojo always acted very subservient to Teeny, to a point where the guys considered him to be an ass-kisser. On one particular night, Tojo was peeking out through the backstage curtain and insulting the local arena rats [wrestling groupies] who were standing around. He was really talking vulgar to them. "Hey, stinky pussy. Hey, you little whore." What he didn't realize was that Teeny

was standing to his left in front of the curtain, but he couldn't see her from his angle. I don't think I've ever seen Tojo turn as red as he did when Teeny stepped out in front of him and gave him a look that would have melted steel. "I don't think that's an appropriate way to get heat, Tojo," she hissed, and walked off. Teeny really liked Tojo, and I think she used the reference to "heat" to give Tojo an excuse for saying what he did. I still laugh when I think about that incident.

Another time, at a spot show at a high school in Kentucky, Lawler drew a picture of a naked woman with big breasts on the blackboard, and for some odd reason known only to himself, a huge penis where the vagina should be. Teeny walked in and saw it! "Jerry, that's not a bit funny!" She turned around and walked right back out. From what I remember, Teeny didn't book Lawler in her spot towns for a long time after that.

Christine Jarrett was a good, Christian woman. When Tojo passed away on February 19,

1992, she personally paid for Tojo's funeral. That's the kind of heart she had. When Teeny died on November 19, 1998, I got into my car and drove from Walls, Mississippi, to Nashville, just to say goodbye to her at the funeral service. I really loved her. I know she's with Jesus in Heaven now. But, again, as I have a habit of doing, I'm getting ahead of myself. At this stage, Teeny was alive and well, and I assured her that I would be back some day, and she assured me that the door would always be open.

The last person I saw when I left Memphis was my good friend, Cleo Reeves, the guy who stooged out Paul E. to me in Fulton, Mississippi. Cleo and I had become close friends during my time in Memphis, even before that night in Fulton, and he was as sad to see me go as I was to be going. After we ate supper together at a truckstop off the Jericho/James Mill exit, Cleo bought me a quart of beer, while I fueled up my Lincoln Town Car. As I pulled onto I-55 North and headed towards Missouri, I looked into my rear view

mirror. I could barely see the image of Cleo standing there, silhouetted by the Arkansas sun, waving and watching me drive off. It was almost a symbol of how my big run in Memphis had come to an end. Out of nostalgia, I saved that empty quart bottle for a long time, as a final reminder of Cleo and my last day in Memphis. I wish I still had it, but that just gives me an excuse to find Cleo and have him buy me another one.

After reaching St. Louis, I turned onto I-70 West for the 257-mile leg to my new base of operations: Kansas City, Missouri. I arrived in Kansas City on Tuesday around three o'clock in the morning. Unlike my initial arrival in the Memphis territory, I had no trouble finding a place to stay. I picked a weekly-rate hotel called the American Inn, and paid three weeks in advance.

I wasn't scheduled to do anything until Wednesday morning, so I spent Tuesday relaxing and familiarizing myself with the area. I already missed Memphis, and I especially missed DeSoto

County, where I had made a lot of friends and connections. I swore to myself that one day, with God's help, I would own property in DeSoto County, and that I would live and die there on the Mississippi Delta, in the shadow of Memphis, Tennessee. It was 1987 and I had almost $20,000 in the bank. That's not too bad for a dried-up, little, street-guy with a drinking problem. I kept telling myself to grow up, to stop being homesick, to work hard, and to save money so I could buy the property I wanted in Mississippi. For the time being, I had to settle for a weekly-rate motel with a microwave oven and a mini-refrigerator. I had to accept that a part of being in the wrestling business was learning to sacrifice, and having to temporarily live in Kansas City was just one of the sacrifices I had to offer up.

Sad, but wise, I kept my chin up and prepared to meet my new boss, Bob Geigel, on Wednesday morning at the TV station in downtown Kansas City. I would also be meeting the crew, who would be there to make the pre-taped, promotional

interviews that would be inserted into the Kansas City TV show, Central States All-Star Wrestling.

By that stage in my career, I was doing a lot better financially than I realized. I realized that when I drove into the TV station parking lot in my very clean and spotless Lincoln Town Car. I was carrying my brand new Halliburton suitcase, a present I bought for myself a few months previously after a particularly good week. I also wore an expensive pair of snakeskin boots that Jeff Jarrett had given me, and a fake Rolex that looked so real, that if you didn't know that the second-hand ticked on a fake one (and didn't sweep smoothly like a real one), you would never be able to tell the difference. When I walked into the TV station, the guys all looked at me as if I had come straight from Beverly Hills.

I knew a few of the guys who had made runs in Memphis, such as Ric McCord and Rip Rogers. I always told people that you should always treat the guys with respect, because you never knew when,

or under what circumstances, you would meet them again. I had been nice to both Rip and Ric, even when they were on their way out of the Memphis territory. In this case, my treatment of them paid off, because Rip was now the booker in the Kansas City territory, while Ric was working on top.

I knew others in the territory by reputation, such as Porkchop Cash, Rufus R. "Freight Train" Jones, "Bulldog" Bob Brown, Mike George, Brad and Bart Batten, Akio Sato, Russell Sapp, announcer Rick Stewart, referee Sonny Myers, and several others. Also there, by the way, was Curtis Hughes, He was just breaking into the business, but I would wind up managing him and traveling with him about six years later in the WWF.

Getting back to my "high-roller" first-impression I gave the guys, I never made "big" money in the wrestling business, but I did okay. Most of the small territories gave the talent a minimum guarantee per night, which was the least amount you would make on any given night. In Memphis,

for example, the nightly minimum was $50, but unless the house was just terrible, I never made less than $85 or $90, and I typically made $125 to $150 per night. In Kansas City, however, the minimum was $65 a night. Rip Rogers gave me that bit of information during our initial phone conversation, when he gave me my starting date. I considered $65 to be a generous amount. That is, until I found out that nobody — not the main event, not the champion, not the curtain jerker — made MORE than $65 a night. Nobody!

If I worked four shows a week, I was looking at a whopping $260 a week! I averaged about $600 a week in Memphis, so this was quite a financial shock. I guess that's why my Lincoln, "Rolex," and fancy suitcase got over with the crew like a fart in a space-suit. Rip Rogers (the booker, bear in mind) actually took me to the side and asked me if I could help him get booked in Memphis! I told him the reason I was in Kansas City was because I had beat them to the punch of sending me out the door by quitting Memphis, so I wouldn't exactly be

the best "lawyer" a person could hire to represent them in their quest to go to Memphis.

I spoke to Porkchop and Rufus next. They were both big, old-time, African-American wrestlers (we called them colored guys, back then, but in this new millennium, we call them African-Americans) who had been very successful, top guys in their day. They had drawn a lot of money all over the country, but in Kansas City in 1987, they were just hanging on, happy and lucky to still be in the business. I remember thinking how sad it was that the guys, due to a number of factors, weren't able to let go when their time was up. Both Porkchop and Rufus welcomed me to the NWA. They were very cordial and welcoming, and the fact that the old-timers accepted me made me accepted by the rest of the crew. It was a good feeling, even though I was staring into the face of a financial nightmare.

Next I met the Batten Twins. They were about to turn heel for the first time to give me a boost as the

evil outsider from Mississippi who had manipulated the fans' favorite tag team into evil, mean, cheating scoundrels. They were really looking forward to turning heel, and thought my being in their corner would be just the emphasis they needed to get over as villains. They were also super-nice guys, and we liked each other immediately. I knew right away that I would enjoy working with them.

Rip told me that the Battens would be making their heel turn that Monday night at the Memorial Hall auditorium, and the interview we were doing that morning would air on television after the heel turn, so we were going to do our first interview together. We really clicked as a team, and while we were making our initial interview, Bob Geigel, the president of the NWA and the owner of the company, walked into the dressing room. When we finished our spiel, I walked over and introduced myself to Mr. Geigel. He was a very nice man, and told me that he had never heard anybody make such a great heel interview. He

wanted to use my gravelly, deep, southern voice to its full advantage and get the maximum heat possible. I was encouraged by his words.

I had seen the Battens work before, and they were great workers, so I figured not only would we get over, but maybe, just maybe we could pop the territory a little bit, and make more than $65 a night.

I believe in my heart that we could have done it, too, if only we had been allowed. Unfortunately, you can sum up in just two words exactly what was wrong with the Kansas City territory: Bob Brown.

Bob Brown was Bob Geigel's assistant, and a real, true-to-life, no-good bastard. He would never allow us, or anyone else, for that matter, to get over.

If you remember Sgt. Carter from the Gomer Pyle, U.S.M.C. TV show that was so popular in the '60s, you know exactly what Bob Brown looked

like. Bob Brown can also be described as the Bill Dundee of the Kansas City territory, with just a couple of tiny, insignificant exceptions. Dundee had a good body, was a good talker, was a good worker, and would look you in the eye and tell you that he screwed you. Bob Brown sucked in every possible way, and nobody could figure out why Bob Geigel kept him in the territory for so many years. My best guess is that Brown had photos of Bob Geigel at a Motel 6 in a hot tub with a high-school cheerleading squad. It couldn't be anything less than that for a no-talent, no-personality, no-look bum like Brown to have so much stroke. It made no sense.

It was very frustrating. The Batten twins were working hard every night, bumping and selling, and having fantastic matches with Ric McCord and Mike George in the semi-final event. And yet, Bob Brown was in the main event every night, killing the momentum of the shows and sucking the air out of the arenas. It didn't matter who he worked with (or should I say "against"), the match always

sucked. In my heart, I don't think Shawn Michaels could have dragged a good match out of Bob Brown, and that's a big statement, because Shawn Michaels is, without a doubt, the greatest, most talented worker, in the history of our business. I think Shawn could have a good match with a dead body, but he would have a tough time getting anything good out of Bob Brown. Brown was that bad.

Most guys would take a big bump in the ring when they got punched or tackled, but not Bob Brown. He would just collapse. He didn't fall down in a quick fashion, either, but in a slow, unconvincing way, almost as if Herman Munster had been stricken with a massive heart attack. It might sound as if I'm overstating things, but that's how absolutely horrid Bob Brown's attempts were at actually taking a bump. It didn't matter how hard Brad and Bart worked. It didn't matter how heavy my interviews were. It didn't matter how energized the fans were. Bob Brown would bring everything to a screeching halt when he stepped

into the ring.

After just three weeks in Kansas City, I was ready to find someplace else to go, and, if possible, take the Battens with me, but I tried to keep a stiff upper lip and do my best. If the Battens weren't so small in stature, their work and ring psychology would have taken them all the way to the WWF tag team championship. They were that good. Unfortunately, they were a bit too small. We just kept on rolling and they kept having great matches with McCord and George.

If the lousy payoffs weren't bad enough, the trips were of epic proportions. I got a comprehensive tour of America's Heartland, the great Midwest. In the Memphis territory, the average trip was about 200 miles, with the worst trip being about 400 miles. In Kansas City, it was feast or famine, trip-wise. Some of the spot shows were within 30 or 40 miles of Kansas City, which was a walk in the park when it came to trips, but they were the icing on the cake. The "cake" itself

extended into six states: Kansas, Missouri, Iowa, Nebraska, Illinois, and Oklahoma. Some of those trips were 500 miles one way, and for what? A lousy $65. Thank goodness Bob Geigel eventually built the territory to where we were working up to six days a week, because four shots a week barely covered the cost of living. It still wasn't the Beverly Hills lifestyle, but it was better than $260 a week.

We drove to every small town in the territory, and we saw every cornfield in every state in the central United States. We worked hard taking bumps and getting McCord and George over. They got us over, as well. The wrestling fans were really getting into our program, and I was doing all the things that had gotten over so well in Memphis: interfering in the matches, getting involved in the Batten's highspots with McCord and George, getting chased around the ring, and taking bumps. The people had never seen anything like it before and they were really getting with it. The proof lay in the fact that, little by little, the houses

were coming up. I don't mean any disrespect to Porkchop Cash or Rufus R. Jones, but nothing else on the card could have been responsible for the upsurge in business. The only new things on the cards were the "new" Batten twins and Downtown Bruno. It was definitely the shot in the arm the territory needed. It sure wasn't Bob Brown, with his slow-motion bumps and horrible legdrop finisher, which looked something like a preschool child falling off a tricycle and trying to break his fall. We just knew we were going to raise the payoff. At least, we thought we would … until the dead bird fell out of the sky and landed right in the center of our parade.

We were given the worst news imaginable. Bob Brown was taking Mike George out of the tag team program and putting him into a jabroni angle with Russell Sapp, a lower mid-card guy from St. Joseph, Missouri. Who was going to jump in to take George's place as McCord's new partner?

Bingo! Bob Brown.

That was like injecting cancer into a healthy body. Our tag team program was the main thing Kansas City had going for it and Bob Brown wanted to kill it dead. The Kansas City territory wasn't about drawing and making money. It was all about making sure that Bob Brown got a big paycheck, and if the territory suffered as a result, then so be it.

That was the last straw. I had taken all that I could take. I told Brad and Bart that I was going to call Ronnie West in Alabama, to see if a spot had opened up for me, and if so, perhaps they would need a great tag team, as well. They were all for the idea and expressed their own desire to get away from Bob Brown.

The next morning, I made the call. Ronnie told me the Fullers were making a few changes, and that the time might be right for me. He gave me Robert Fuller's home number and told me to give him a call. I gambled a "dime" and did just that. When Robert answered the phone, I got a

better response than I expected.

Surprisingly enough, Robert had been trying to track me down for over a month. The last phone number he had for me was from Nashville, where I bunked up with Rocky and Dewey. They had long since left for Tampa, Florida, so Robert had no idea of how to reach me. I don't know if he had heard that I was working in Kansas City, but even if he had, he couldn't have called because it was taboo to talk to talent working for another promotion and attempt to take them away.

Robert had an idea for me, but it didn't involve my tag team. The gimmick would feature a small, evil manager, and a huge, muscular villain known as Lord Humongous, like the character in Mel Gibson's Mad Max 2: The Road Warrior movie.

After Robert had seen my publicity photos, and had heard about my work through the grapevine, he knew my character would be perfect for the manager spot. What he hadn't found, however,

was somebody who was right for the Humongous gimmick. He told me that if I found the right guy for the deal, he would give me a full-time spot. I tried to push for the Battens again, but he already had a heel team — himself and Jimmy Golden. When I tried to throw the Battens into the mix as a babyface team, he said the Armstrongs had that spot. I found myself in a real predicament. I had an opportunity for a good spot with the CWA (Alabama), but I couldn't do anything for my friends, and I felt terrible about it. Even though it wasn't the case, I felt like I was screwing my friends, and I didn't like it. I had heard a lot of good things about the Alabama territory, so I was ready to make the jump, but I hated to leave my friends on the "sinking" ship.

I told Robert that I would call him back in about a week, after I gave some thought as to who would fit the gimmick. In the meantime, I went back to work and told the Battens that I hadn't gotten a response from Alabama. I didn't like lying to them, but I wasn't doing it because I was a no-

good, Bruce Prichard-type person. I was just buying time, hoping I could come up with an idea of who would fit the bill for the gimmick.

The following night was an off-night, so as I sat in my motel room (drinking beer and missing Mississippi, as always), it hit me like a ton of bricks. I had the perfect guy to play the Lord Humongous character. Sid Eudy, the big guy from Arkansas.

I called him right away, and was excited to hear that he was still interested in the business, even though he wasn't wrestling at the time. When I told him what Robert had in mind, Sid told me he would love to do it. I told him I would hammer out the deal and call him back as soon as I had it worked out. I then called Robert at his house, but his wife told me he was on the road and to call back in about three days. Later that day, the Battens and I had to go to Falls City, Nebraska, to work with Ric McCord and Bob Brown, so like I always did, I went to the Parvin Road Texaco and

met the Battens for the trip to Nebraska.

That night, Bob Brown did something that caused me to quit right there on the spot. Actually, several things had happened that pushed me towards making such an irrational decision. First of all, there was the problem of ridiculously long trips and low pay. Additionally, the checks we picked up at the office that Thursday were no good. Basically, they were IOUs that would be paid out of the houses at the arenas, not at a bank or check-cashing store. Believe me, we all tried to cash them. The Battens and I had even been in car races on gravel roads in Maxwell, Iowa, trying to beat the babyfaces to the sponsor's house, so we could cash our "checks" before the money gave out. Bob Brown had convinced Bob Geigel that I would be more effective as a manager if I was sitting in a chair at ringside, instead of getting involved in the match at the proper time, which effectively took away all the reason for me being there.

But it was Bob Brown's actions that night which pushed me right to the edge. He decided that when he made his comeback, I would jump up on the ring apron and he would headbutt me. After falling to the arena floor, I would get color. For the uninitiated, "getting color" means doing a blade job, which meant slicing my forehead open with a razor blade and bleeding like a stuck hog. Well, I had done that hundreds of times in Memphis, so one more time wouldn't hurt. Besides, he was the boss, as much as I hated to accept the fact.

Before the match, I took my niacin (to thin the blood, thus making the blood flow more freely and easily), drank a quart of beer (for the same reason), and made my blade. When the time came for the headbutt, I was Johnny on the spot. Boom! I took the bump, gigged my head like a trooper, and bled like I had been shot in the head with a 9mm pistol.

When I got back to the dressing room, Bob Geigel was furious. He was madder than I had ever seen

him. He asked me why on earth I would get juice without being told to do so. As I explained that Bob Brown had told me to do it, Brown walked into the dressing room. Brown tilted his head back in the cocky manner he had whenever he was about to say something that would almost certainly piss somebody off, looked Bob Geigel right in the eye, and said, "I never told him such a thing!"

What a lying, no-good bastard. In an earlier chapter, I called Bill Dundee "Satan." Compared to Bob Brown, Dundee was the Pope. While this was taking place, the Battens walked in and intervened. "We heard Bob Brown tell Bruno to gig himself." Right about that time, Ric McCord walked in, and repeated what the Battens and I had already said.

Bob Brown is the type of guy who would be standing next to a freshly murdered corpse, with a bloody knife in his hand, and try to lie his way out of it. That lie was so absurd that it will go down in the annals of wrestling history as a

classic. Brown said that Brad Batten, Bart Batten, Ric McCord, and I, had all misunderstood him. He claimed that what he really said was that when he headbutted me off the apron, that I was to be sure NOT to blade myself. That was the most asinine thing I had ever heard in my life. It was such a totally idiotic statement that I wasn't going to waste my time arguing about it. I just walked over to Bob Geigel, thanked him for everything, and told him that I needed to finish up as soon as possible. I went downstairs, showered, got dressed, and we headed back to Kansas City.

During the trip home, I decided it was time to tell the Battens about my discussion with Robert Fuller. They weren't upset at all. In fact, they seemed to be genuinely happy for me, and told me that I really deserved to be working in a better territory than Kansas City.

The next day, Robert Fuller called and asked if I had found a guy who would "fit the bill." When I told him I had, he asked me when we could start. I

related the events of the previous night in Nebraska. He told me to call Bob Geigel and tell him that I would be willing to work as many dates as he needed, up to three weeks, so I could finish up the right way. Robert told me to call him back when I got my finishing date and he would give Sid and me a starting date in Alabama.

I had calmed down considerably since the Bob Brown incident, and I really had a lot of respect for Bob Geigel, so I did just what Robert suggested and called him. Geigel actually said he was about to call me to discuss my notice, and I believed him. Bob Geigel wasn't your typical lying, no-good, backstabbing, wrestling promoter. He was a good man, and if he said he had been about to call me, I believed him. I told him I needed to get a finishing date, but that I'd be willing to work right up until the end, and I would do whatever I was told.

He then asked me if he could persuade me to get some mileage out of the heat I had developed

among the fans of the territory, and work me up to actually wrestling in a loser-leave-town match as my farewell to Kansas City. He said he'd take care of me on the payoff, and expressed a belief that it could draw a house. I thought about it for a minute and agreed, but under one condition: I would do it for anybody but Bob Brown. Geigel said he understood and asked me if I would do it for Ric McCord. Of course, I didn't hesitate and readily agreed. I liked Ric. He was a good guy and a heck of a worker. He was also a flaming homosexual, as was the (late) announcer, Rick Stewart, who died of AIDS, but that didn't affect my friendship with Ric McCord. I only mention this in passing, because I thought it was ironic that the territory's hottest babyface, the guy all the girls loved, and brought flowers to, and gave their phone numbers to, was actually more interested in playing hide-the-sausage with their big brother, but what they didn't know didn't hurt them.

Ric and I started the ball rolling in St. Joseph, Missouri, and had the blow-off set for two

weeks. I called Robert Fuller and got a starting date for five weeks from the date I finished in Kansas City. That was great, because for the first time since I got into the business, I would have three weeks off, give or take the travel time. That would prove to be more valuable than gold. I gave Sid the heads up, and we anticipated our upcoming "marriage." We agreed that I would call him after I finished up in Kansas City and we would begin making plans. For the time being, however, I was going to concentrate on going out with a bang in Kansas City.

Ric McCord and I were pretty good buddies, and we knew we could make the angle work. Bob Geigel gave us a green light to do the angle in our own way, so we did a lot of brainstorming. To provoke the loser-leave-town match, I would attack McCord on TV and throw "toxic" powder into his eyes, causing him to lose his match with Akio Sato. Geigel gave the idea his blessings, so that's what we did. After McCord "recovered" from the powdering, he went to announcer Rick

Stewart and made this bold statement: "Downtown Bruno. Next week, I'm going to bring a contract out here for you to sign, for a no holds barred, no disqualification, loser leaves town match, with you against me in Kansas City. I've had it with you and your constant interference. If you'll sign the contract, I'll put up $10,000 cash, and if you beat me, I'll leave, and you'll get the money!"

Later in the program, the Battens and I came marching out onto the set and I responded to Ric's challenge. "Forget about bringing a contract next week," I said. "Let's make the match right now, in front of the TV audience! If you'll get Bob Geigel out here to sanction the match, we'll sign it right here and now!"

Of course, Geigel came out and signed the match, and scheduled it for Kansas City in two weeks. Naturally, I bragged to Rick Stewart that I had a master plan. "McCord isn't going to beat me. I'll be staying, and he'll be leaving. It's as simple as that."

Bob Geigel added an extra stipulation to the match that really sold it to the wrestling fans. The Battens would be banned from ringside, which eliminated any possibility of them helping me, while Bob Brown, Mike George, Vinny Valentino (a babyface), and Rufus R. Jones would be stationed at ringside to prevent me from escaping from the ring. I would also have to put up $10,000 cash, which McCord would receive in the event of my loss. The Battens and I went berserk. I screamed and acted furious, then we stormed off in a rage. The people viewing the taping live were hooked.

Of course, since we taped two weeks of television at a time (it's hard to explain), "two weeks" was really the following week, so I actually had the match the following Thursday night in Kansas City. Even though I lost the loser-leave-town match, I continued to work another week in the rest of the territory, where the people wouldn't see the loser-leave-town match until the end of that week. Got it? I hope so. I barely do.

I'm proud to say that the house was up considerably, and without a doubt, it was McCord and I who did it. It sure wasn't Bob Brown, who wrestled Akio Sato that night (no disrespect to Sato).

When the dramatic contest between Ric McCord and me was about to begin, I chose a rather unique ring entrance. I was carried to the ring on the shoulders of the Battens (evidently, I had forgotten that they were barred from ringside) to the tune of Diana Ross' song, "I'm Coming Out," which was more or less a gay anthem at the time. I have to admit that it was a rib by Rip Rogers towards my friend, McCord, who, as I said, was an admitted homosexual.

Of course, the referee, Jay French, and the senior referee, Sonny Myers, who was at ringside, started raising hell about the Battens being there, and in a scene reminiscent of modern-day WWE's RAW, a

squad of police officers removed the Battens from the area, while I screamed like a banshee. Of course, they were the Kansas City police, who Geigel hired as security at the matches in Memorial Hall, so they basically knew what was going on. Even so, the scene was very effective, and the wrestling fans ate it up.

A few minutes later, the handsome, young Ric McCord made his way to the ring, led by his quartet of babyfaces and accompanied by the sound of Michael Jackson's "Beat It." That was a good song choice and it got a good reaction, as did McCord's "Bye-Bye Bruno" t-shirt, which even I liked (of course, I acted as if I hated it worse than a dose of the clap). When the music stopped, the announcements were made, the bell rang, and the match began.

It wasn't exactly a Shawn Michaels versus Bret Hart match, but for all it's limitations, I thought it was one hell of a match. Okay, okay. It was as good as could be expected. How's

that? Whatever you think, it served the purpose.

As soon as McCord rushed towards me, I ran out of the ring and tried to escape to the dressing room, but Rufus was waiting. To the delight of the audience, he threw me right back into the ring. Apparently, retardation kicked in, because I bailed out on Vinny's side (with the same result), then Mike George's side (ditto), but I never made my way to where "Bulldog" Bob Brown stood. Selective retardation, I guess. McCord finally grabbed me and prepared to cold-cock me. Of course, before he hit me, he made the cardinal mistake (don't ever do this in a street fight) of cocking his fist, and then looking around at the spectators. I took the opportunity to pull out my trusty chain and "whop" him in the jaw with it. "Whop" is what we do in Mississippi when we hit somebody. That gave me the upper hand, and Ric sold as if he had been punched by Muhammad Ali. I was all over him now, like flies on sh–. (Sorry, Ric. If you're reading this, I don't mean that as it sounds.) I kicked him, stomped

him, choked him, punched him, worked him over very aggressively, and finally, as I started to blow up (lose my wind), I (secretly) asked him if he was ready to make his comeback. To my surprise, he very unselfishly said, "No."

Now bear in mind that there are guys today who bitch about selling for people like Undertaker, Triple H, Shawn Michaels, and even Snitsky, but McCord wanted to sell as much as possible for me, not only because he knew that he was going over, but because he wanted the match to mean something. And thanks to him, it did.

I finally whispered, "Fu– it, Ric. Move out of the way," and I climbed to the top rope. As I dropped down towards him with a Killer Kahn Kneedrop, Ric rolled out of the way at the last possible second (literally, which scared the crap out of me), and I hit the mat with a sickening thud. Ric stood up, stalked me in Hulk Hogan fashion, and started bumping me around the ring like a rag doll. The more I bumped, the louder the people screamed

and cheered. We had them right where we wanted them.

When Ric was trapped in one of the corners, the Battens came charging down the aisle towards the ring. As the four babyfaces and the referee turned to keep them away, McCord became temporarily distracted … and I made my move. I reached into my tights, slowly pulled out my vial of powder, and discreetly poured a pile of it into the palm of my hand. The people were literally in an uproar. Their macho warrior was about to get blinded and beaten by the little, mean bastard that they liked to call "faggot." (Little did they know just how reversed the roles really were.) Just as I was approaching Ric to toss the mixture into his face, Bob Brown (he just had to get his pop) rolled into the ring and kicked my hand, which miraculously caused me to throw the powder into my own eyes (what a weird business). Ric covered me and, along with about 2,500 people, Jay French counted 1-2-3! The people went nuts. As he covered me, Ric quietly said, "Thank

you." Jay French said, "Good job," and the Battens came in and carried me to the dressing room.

What's really funny is that the situation, which should have been really touching, was a little easier to deal with since both of the Battens were pinching my ass as hard as they could while they carried me back. It was hard not to laugh, and even harder not to scream out in pain. Leave it to the Battens to take the sentiment out of the situation.

Well, I had no tears to shed. It wasn't Memphis. I had no history there, and no future, for that matter. It was just a place to work. The one positive thing about my short run in Kansas City is that I had made a few new friends. It was, however, time to move on. On my last night in the territory, I thanked Rufus, Mike, Rip, and Rick, and had a special thank you for Ric McCord (it's not what you're thinking) for giving me such a great sendoff. I simply told him that I would never forget the way he sold for me, and that I'd be

looking forward to seeing him down the road one day. Unfortunately, that never happened. Ric and I never crossed paths again. I've heard several rumors about how his life and health changed, but never substantiated any of them, so I'll just leave it like this: Ric, if you're reading this, thanks for everything. I hope you are doing well, wherever you are.

When I thanked Mr. Geigel for his kindness and understanding, he told me that whenever I was ready, I would always be welcome to come back. That was nice, but it might have been more encouraging if Kansas City hadn't gone out of business inside of the next eight months. Two things ran through my mind: 1) Thank God I had the foresight to leave; and 2) Bob Brown had no place to work. For some strange reason, a feeling of elation washes over me when I think about that.

Gene Anderson, incidentally, is someone who deserves a mention here, for the simple fact that he made me feel really, really bad one day in the

early ‘80s, when I was still new, green, and excited about the business. He did it again in 1989 when he came to look over the Kansas City territory for Jim Crockett, who was thinking about buying it. I won’t glorify him by going into great detail, other than by saying he didn’t even know me, or take time to find out who I was, or why I was there, before he physically removed me from the dressing room on both occasions. He made me look like an idiot in front of a lot of people. There was one good thing I learned from the incident. I learned how it felt to be humiliated, and I swore that if I ever made it in the business, I would always be respectful to the new guys, and to people who were trying to make it. I would never try to hurt anyone’s feelings. To the three other guys who were a part of the Minnesota Wrecking Crew — Arn Anderson (a great guy who I really like), Ole Anderson (who I’ve never met), and Lars Anderson (who I talked about earlier in this book) — I apologize for my brutal honesty here, but here goes: Gene Anderson was a no-good, twitching, rotten, piece of crap, and now he’s

deader than a mackerel and I'm still standing. A lot of people tend to forgive people after they've passed on, and even show them the respect that's due to the dead, but I'm sorry. If you're a piece of crap when you're alive, then when you die, you're a dead piece of crap.

The one thing I wasn't happy about was leaving my friends, Brad and Bart Batten. To this day, we stay in contact and remain close friends, a fact of which I am very proud. After they left Kansas City, they went to Puerto Rico to work for the World Wrestling Council … until they got arrested for some … well, lets just say "personal problems," that being in a foreign, exotic environment led them to become involved with. I was sorry to hear that, but happy to find out, in our later communication, that they "kicked out" of their problems. They went on to wrestle for World Class Wrestling in Texas and Smoky Mountain Wrestling in Tennessee, and are still busy on the independent scene in and around their native West Virginia. They have also developed a successful

construction business.

Two days before I left Kansas City, an interesting thing happened to Rip Rogers and me that I feel is worth mentioning, for entertainment value, if nothing else. I was sitting in the Waffle House on Woods Chapel Road when Rip Rogers walked in. As we ate our meal, Rip told me that he had to go to the grocery store, so I rode there with him and we talked while he shopped. We reminisced about the time the alternator on his van went out on the way back to Kansas City from Lincoln, Nebraska. In order to preserve the electrical juice that remained in his car battery, he drove all the way back to Kansas City with his headlights turned off, following close behind me as I drove with my emergency blinkers flashing. When we got back to Kansas City with our worthless checks in our pockets, Rip hollered out, "I hate it here!," like a little kid, and how we both laughed at the absurdity of being in such a situation.

After Rip finished buying his groceries, and we

finished talking, he dropped me off at my motel room. The next morning, when I woke up and went outside to go to breakfast, I went into a state of shock. My car was gone! It had been stolen! My prized possession, my Lincoln Town Car, was missing! My Lincoln was more than just a car. It was a testament to my years of hard work. It was a symbol of a kid who had left the streets of western Pennsylvania and the bean fields of DeSoto County, Mississippi, to become a real player in the wrestling business. I ran to the front desk of the motel and, in hysterics, demanded that the clerk immediately call the police. I was enraged. How could I keep my date in Alabama without a car? I was in deep, deep trouble.

The police arrived in prompt fashion and took my statement. They wrote down all the necessary information and told me they would call me as soon as they learned anything at all. My mind was creating scenarios that would have been very appropriate in a major Hollywood motion picture. I pictured a group of evil gangsters

smoking big cigars, treacherous car thieves counting their money from the theft, and efficient chop-shop attendants removing parts from my Lincoln for resale on the black market.

I wasn't back in my room for 15 minutes when the phone rang. It was the Blue Springs Police Department. They had found my car less than a mile away from the motel. "Where was it?" I asked. "Was it damaged in any way?"

The officer's response nailed me between the eyes. "It's sitting in the parking lot of the Waffle House."

At that moment, I felt like I was the dumbest human being on the face of the earth … even dumber than Tom Prichard, and that's really, really, dumb. You could have knocked me down with a dirty look, as I immediately realized my utter stupidity. The previous night, Rip Rogers and I met at the Waffle House by sheer coincidence. When he dropped me off at the motel

after our trip to the grocery store, neither one of us remembered that I had left my car at the Waffle House. I felt like a complete idiot. I didn't know whether to tell the officer what happened or not. I decided not to, because I was afraid of getting charged for filing a false police report, or something of that nature, so I just asked him if I could go get my car. He said he'd meet me at my motel and give me a ride there. As we drove the short distance to my car, the officer expressed surprise that the "thieves" had parked the car properly in a well-lit parking lot, and actually locked the doors. I didn't admit to anything. I just identified the car, signed a few papers, and drove away feeling pretty stupid.

Chapter 10
Lord Humongous

On my way to Alabama, I had enough time set aside to make two stops. The first stop was DeSoto County, Mississippi, where I revisited the place I loved and reaffirmed my goal in life. The next stop was West Memphis, Arkansas, to pick up Sid.

At that point in time, I really didn't know Sid very well, but when I stopped by his house to pick him up, I found him to be a normal guy with a nice family. I was reassured to have a good feeling about Sid because I knew that we would be "married" in the Alabama territory for quite some time. When it was all said and done, we were together there for 13 months.

When I first met Sid, he was a big, muscular guy, but by this time, he looked like a statue of a Greek

God sculpted by Michelangelo. That's not an exaggeration. He was the biggest, most muscular, most impressive-looking guy I had ever seen in my life. I had no doubt whatsoever that Robert Fuller would love the way Sid looked.

In December 1987, we left West Memphis for Birmingham, the CCW's central city, in our respective cars. We each wanted our own mode of transportation so we would be able to get around during our off-days and free time. Birmingham was only 210 miles from Memphis, so we agreed to return to the Memphis area every Wednesday and Thursday, our days off, alternating cars each week. Sid wanted to be with his family and I wanted to be with my friends in Walls. That was a great arrangement.

My grandmother had a lot of connections in Walls and I knew I would always have a place there to stay. At least, I did until she died during the very same week that Sid and I were making our initial trip to Birmingham. Since I wasn't exactly the

"once a week call mama" type of guy (which was wrong, but I did a lot of wrong in those days), I didn't find out about it until two weeks after it happened. I felt so bad, because more than anything, my grandmother wanted to be buried in the cemetery on DeSoto Road in Walls. Unfortunately, that graveyard is owned by the Missionary Baptist Church, and you can't be buried there unless you're … well, how can I say this and be politically correct … non-white folks. My grandma was as white as a lily, so there was no chance that she'd be getting buried on DeSoto Road. The Catholics didn't have a cemetery in the diocese, so Grandma is spending eternity in the hills of West Virginia, instead of the Mississippi Delta. Well, her body is. Her spirit is in DeSoto County, but I know beyond any doubt that her soul is in Heaven.

But back to my story. We were on our way to Birmingham, starting over in a new territory once again, and living the gypsy lifestyle I had become quite used to. We arrived in Birmingham on a

Saturday night, but our starting date wasn't until Monday, so we had a little time for some male bonding. I liked Sid, but I was very intimidated by him, as any 5-foot-7, 120-pound, pipsqueak would be by a 300-pound, 6-foot-8 giant of a man, with a facial expression that would break glass.

We had to find a place to stay, so we decided to park Sid's car at a gas station and hop into my Lincoln, then ride around looking for accommodations. That wasn't what I call fun since we didn't want to spend a lot of money. I had my savings, but that was "save-ings," not "spendings," and Sid didn't bring much cash with him, so cheapness was our agenda, rather than luxury. We wound up on Roebuck Parkway on the "less desirable" side of the "magic city" (as Birmingham was known) and found a room at the Parkway Inn for $80 a week. Judging by the price, you just know it was a fantastic place. Not! What a dump. Since then, Sid has probably made enough dough to buy that motel five or six times over, but at the time, we thought it was a great find. If I

close my eyes and think about it, I can still smell the odor of that dump. To this day, when renting a motel room, my rule of thumb is to leave immediately if I smell that odor when I walk into the check-in area. At that time, though, the rate was the main thing, not the odor, so we paid $40 each (no tax) and walked into our room.

The room was terrible beyond belief. The memories alone almost make me nauseous, but I'll do my best to describe the situation. It almost made poverty look good. To begin with, most rooms have a light switch on the wall as you enter the room. Not this one. Instead, there was a lamp on a beat-up, wooden table on the far side of the room. It was the one-and-only light in the room, although there was a bare, exposed bulb hanging above the sink in the bathroom. The TV was a portable, mini, black-and-white, and the bed linens looked as if they hadn't been washed since … well, I honestly don't think they had ever been washed. It was so bad that I just wanted to buy a tent and go live in the woods.

That wasn't a very good beginning to the first night I was going to spend with my new sasquatch friend. What I didn't know at the time was that things were going to steadily get worse.

We bought a case of beer, put in on ice, brought it into the room, and began drinking. The more Sid drank, the odder he acted. As we sat there with the door cracked open for ventilation (there was no air conditioner, of course), a guy walked past our door several times. He was just going about his business (getting ice, getting cokes from the machine, getting his belongings out of his car, and so forth), but Sid didn't see it that way. "Let me tell you something, Bruno," Sid whispered, in a voice much like the one he would use years later on TV when he was Sycho Sid. "That mother fu–er sees that Lincoln with those Mississippi tags out there and is figuring out a way to steal it! The next time he walks by, you'd better open up that door and tell him to stay the fu– away from your car!"

"But, Sid ..." I tried to interrupt and explain that I

didn't think the guy was up to anything wrong, but Sid cut me off mid-sentence. "This is Alabama, boy. You're not in Memphis anymore," he snarled. "If you don't tell him off the next time he walks past our room, you'll have to deal with me! Understand?"

The only thing running through my mind at that point was, "What the fu– have I gotten myself into with this guy?"

Much to my dismay, the guy came walking towards our room. Sid pulled out a knife with a blade almost as long as a ruler and said, "You'd better go straighten out the guy or you'll find out just how sharp my knife blade is."

The guy didn't look like he was up to anything! He had a brown paper sack in his hand, which I supposed had a 6-pack or something in it, and was innocently walking towards his room. As I nervously walked towards the open doorway, Sid suddenly jumped up, shoved me out the door, and

yelled at the guy in a loud voice. "Hey, this guy here says get the fu– away from his car." He slammed and locked the door behind me and left me standing on the sidewalk. I felt as out of place as a pork chop at a Jewish wedding. The guy looked at me like I was an idiot, and I really couldn't blame him. When he started to approach me, I really started to worry. There I was — 125 pounds, half drunk, standing defenseless in my underwear, locked out of my room, and standing frozen to the spot, while a fairly big guy is possibly going to accost me.

Unknown to me, Sid was watching the drama taking place outside the window. When the guy was about three feet away from me, Sid yanked open the door said, "Hey, Bruno! Quit bothering that poor guy." He grabbed me by the arm, pulled me back into the room, and slammed the door. I'll bet the guy had no idea what had just happened. I barely did. What I did know was that I had a massive, hulking, brute, with a possible mental problem, on my hands. I wasn't sure if I was ready

for whatever lay ahead, but I hoped the shenanigans were over for the night.

Little did I know that the "fun" was just beginning.

A few hours later, we got ready to go to sleep. Sid turned out the light and the room became dark and silent. Just as I began drifting off to sleep, I heard something go click. I wondered where it was coming from. I remained still for a few seconds, then I heard it again. Click. Then the noise began in earnest. Click … click … click … click.

I pushed the sheets aside, got out of bed, and walked across the room to turn on the lamp. What I saw next was something I will never be able to forget. My incredibly large roommate was sitting on the side of his bed, opening and closing his incredibly large knife, over and over again, and grinning at me like the Joker in the Batman movie. "Wh … what … what are you doing that for?" I nervously asked him.

"Just don't worry about it," answered Sid. "Turn out the light and go to sleep."

I did exactly what he said, except for the sleep part. As I laid there, I made a mental note to call Lawler in the morning to see about going back to Memphis.

I was really scared, but I tried my best to go to sleep. After five minutes went by, I began to relax.

Click.

It started again.

Click … click … click … click.

As I got up to turn on the lamp again, Sid told me to lay back down and leave the light off. I was really shaken, but I did as he said. "Go to sleep," Sid whispered.

After five seconds passed, with a touch of insanity in his voice, he whispered, "Sleep

forever!" and dove onto my bed, laughing hysterically. I screamed, jumped off the other side of the bed, and turned on the lamp. Sid was hyperventilating on my bed. I thought, "This guy is going to kill me." Panic-stricken , I grabbed my clothes and my keys, went outside, and slept the rest of the night on the back seat of my Lincoln … with the doors locked.

At 4:30 in the morning, I was awakened by the sound of Sid knocking on my car window. He motioned for me to come back into the room. I hesitated, but cautiously opened the door and stepped out. I couldn't imagine what he had in store for me next. To my surprise, that was his normal wake-up time. He always got up early and went to the gym for the first of his two daily workouts. "Get in the bed and quit being such a scaredy-cat," he said. "We're gonna be working together for a long time, so I was just breaking the ice." He held a protein shake in his hand and told me to be ready at eight o'clock, so we could go to breakfast before driving to Gadsden, Alabama, for

our CCW debut.

I felt a lot better now, knowing (or should I say, hoping) that Sid wasn't insane. He was just a guy with a very odd sense of humor. After he returned from his workout, we ate breakfast and went back to our room.

I came to realize that working out was a passion for Sid. In fact, it was almost a religion. It was his driving force in life. He woke up every morning at 4:30 and ran the bleacher steps at whatever high school football field he could find, then went to the gym and did his weight training. Later in the day, he would return to the gym and do a 90-minute cardio workout. He did that every day. Rain, shine, sick, well, long trip, short trip, no trip. It didn't matter. Sid was a machine.

Later that night, we made the 60-mile trip from Birmingham to Gadsden and met our new boss and "co-workers." I had crossed paths with some of

the guys in other territories. Dutch Mantell and Scott Hall, who had both passed through Memphis during my time there, and Tracy Smothers, who wrestled Tony Falk during my Memphis debut, were the first to greet me.

The guys I had never met included "Nightmare" Danny Davis, a stocky, muscular, little guy who was a great worker and had a real good mind for the business. He later became partners with Jim Cornette in the Ohio Valley Wrestling organization. Jimmy Golden, a long-time veteran who could really go in the ring, was Robert Fuller's assistant booker. "Wildcat" Wendell Cooley, a guy with a great look and build, was really over as a babyface in the CCW, but he had one problem. He had a really shifty, cocky, overbearing attitude.

"Doctor" Tom Prichard, a very good worker, was perhaps the dumbest guy I ever met in my life. However, he was, and still is, a nice guy, and not an evil genius like his younger brother,

Bruce. I think it is better to be dumb and nice, rather than be smart and evil, but that's just my opinion. Anyway, when I describe Dr. Tom as being dumb, maybe I'm being a little too harsh. I believe he just didn't think things through, or maybe the synapses didn't make it all the way from his brain to his mouth, which would make him appear to be dumb.

Next, I met Robert Fuller and his brother, Ron, the "Tennessee Stud." Ron was the owner, booker, and my new boss. I was happy to see that he was a very nice guy and that he was pleased with what he saw in Sid and me. He gave us our booking sheets, which told us where we were booked during the upcoming two weeks, and told us what we were to do that evening on our CCW debut.

Robert gave us our basic interview and introduced us to the commentator and interviewer, the legendary Gordon Solie, who I would later count as a close friend. Since Sid was a leather-clad, hockey-mask wearing monster, I was

assigned to do all of the talking. I told Gordon (and the viewing audience) about Lord Humongous and Downtown Bruno, and gave our reasons for being in the CCW. Basically, my job was to paint a heel picture of Sid and myself. Sid (Humongous) then went to the ring to take on two opponents in a handicap match. He squashed them unmercifully and pinned them simultaneously, while I screamed and demanded the ref make a five-count (the old King Kong Bundy gimmick), as opposed to the standard three-count. Sid seemingly beat those two guys within an inch of there lives, and he did it convincingly.

"Bullet" Bob Armstrong, who was a great veteran of the mat wars and a nice guy, suggested that "Hugo" (the nickname for Sid's character, short for Humongous) use the Japanese Shennenomacki hold for his finish, which was the same hold as Sgt. Slaughters Cobra Clutch, and later, Ted DiBiase's Million Dollar Dream. At that point in time, being brand new to the territory, we weren't in any position to argue, so we went with it, but Sid and I

both knew that a more specialized and eye-popping finale was necessary. When the time was right, we were going to talk to Robert about it, but day one certainly wasn't the time.

We drove a lot of miles in the territory, commuting from our home base of Birmingham to Montgomery (AL), to Panama City (FL), to Knoxville (TN), to Chattanooga (TN), to Albany (GA), to Cherokee (NC), and every small and mid-sized town in-between. During the long hours on the road, Sid and I talked about potential finishing moves for "Hugo." We discussed all sorts of finishes: the piledriver (overdone), the backbreaker (boring), the power slam (used too often as a high spot), and the neckbreaker (ditto). Sid then told me that he had envisioned a move that he had never seen before, but had invented in his mind on our way to Knoxville. The move is now one of the most common moves in our business: the power bomb. Yes, I can attest to the fact that Sidney Ray Eudy invented the power bomb in 1987.

For those of you who aren't exactly sure what a power bomb is, let me describe it. The recipient of the move is bent over forward with his head placed between Sid's thighs. This starting position was also used in the old piledriver finisher. However, instead of lifting him up and dropping him onto his head, Sid swings his opponent's body upwards (while holding onto his waist) and drops him down back-first to the mat. After getting back to his feet, Sid would place his foot on his opponent's chest (if he was a jobber) and stand while the referee counted five.

For the uninitiated, a "jobber" is a guy whose "job" is to make his opponents look good. He usually works on television and in the opening matches on house shows. Many times, the jobbers work a regular "9 to 5" job in the "real" world, and work part-time as a wrestler on nights and on weekends. There were notable exceptions to that rule, however. The top job guys were so good at making top talent look good (especially guys who were pushed on top, but weren't good workers)

that they were able to make a good, full-time living getting beat every night. Just a few examples of guys in this category include "Brooklyn Brawler" Steve Lombardi, Barry Horowitz, Jim Powers, S.D. Jones, Mike Sharpe, and T.D. Steel. There were also guys, like the Hardy Boys and Justin Credible, who started out as jobbers, but worked themselves up the card to the higher-profile matches. Those guys are the exception to the rule, however. Most of the jobbers were jobbers because they weren't very good, and most jobbers remained jobbers throughout their career.

However, many of the Alabama jobbers didn't remain jobbers after working with Sid. They quit the business. That's how devastating the new move was. Unlike a pile driver, where the "giver" is responsible for protecting the "taker," with the power bomb, the "taker" holds half of the responsibility for taking care of himself. If the "taker" fails to tuck his chin deeply into his chest, he would be dazed, if not knocked unconscious. Unfortunately, a lot of the job guys

found themselves in exactly that predicament.

The wrestling fans really believed in the move. It looked real.

Let me restate that. It was real.

After Sid worked strictly with jobbers on television for about a month, the people were ready to see Sid embroiled in a feud with one of the top babyfaces in the territory. There was one problem: nobody wanted to work with him because nobody wanted to take the power bomb. One guy finally stepped forward and volunteered — Danny Davis.

Danny always had a lot of balls, and even though he was a lot smaller in stature than Sid, we — me, Sid, and the office — all agreed that his psychology and work would get the match over. Danny, a 10-year veteran of wrestling, was liked and respected by everybody, and everybody knew that he was all about business. He wouldn't

try to get himself over by making Sid look inept (like Bill Dundee would have done) by kicking him in the ass, or punching him in the nuts. He knew there was a lot of money to be made with the Lord Humongous gimmick, and he knew that by working with Sid, rather than against him, the match would get over. When that happened, Sid would get over, business in the territory would pick up, and we would all make money. As we expected, Danny put Sid over like a million bucks, kept himself strong in the process, and involved me in each match. He was a very unselfish guy, and I respect and admire him very much for that.

It worked in every town on the circuit. In every town, from Mobile to Montgomery, Knoxville to Kickapoo, Itta Bena to Inverness, we had the same match every night. With Quiet Riot's "Mental Health" echoing throughout the auditorium or arena, Sid ("Hugo") and I would be the first to come to the ring. Sid would step over the top rope and into the ring, then he'd pick me up and pull me in. After we had milked the crowd for a few

seconds, the sound of The Cars "Hello Again" would kick in over the P.A system, and everybody's favorite wrestler, "Nightmare" Danny Davis, would animatedly make his way to the ring, slapping high fives with the guys and hugging the girls.

When he reached the ring, Sid would block his entry, while I would take the microphone away from Rodney West (Ronnie West's son). "Nightmare," I would say in my mean, little Mississippi voice. "I'm going to give you a break tonight! You don't have to wrestle the great Lord Humongous, but you don't get a free payday, either, boy! You have to take on me, the one-and-only Downtown Bruno!"

Danny, who was the Southeastern heavyweight champion, the number two belt in the territory behind the Continental heavyweight title, would act amazed and say he didn't think it was worth his time to wrestle a little wimp like me. "Hugo" would then get angry and I would "hold him back,"

then I would repeat my challenge, saying I thought "DD" was "too scared" to wrestle me. Once again, DD would back off, repeating that I wasn't a wrestler and too scrawny for him to fool with.

As he turned to give the microphone to Rodney, I spun him around and tossed a handful of powder into his face. I immediately went into attack mode, punching, stomping, choking, and kicking. DD would slowly stop selling and start coming up, finally making his move and forcing me into a corner of the ring. Just as he was about to nail me, Hugo would Pearl Harbor him from behind. I would roll out of the ring, while Sid took over; pounding, beating, and manhandling DD for about five minutes. When he thought the time was right, Danny would tell Sid to whip him into the ropes, and to catch him in a bear hug when he rebounded off. The people were beside themselves. There was no way their hero could withstand the vice-like grip of such an unstoppable, unruly monster. Sid would squeeze DD and shake him around like a rag doll, while Danny sold. DD

would attempt to punch his way free, but Sid would just shake it off and reapply the bear hug. DD would break free by stomping Sid's foot, then he would hit the ropes, but Sid would catch him in the bearhug as he rebounded. The people hollered and yelled as Danny seemed to weaken with every passing second. In a last-ditch effort, Danny poked his forefinger and bird finger into the eye holes in Sid's mask. Sid sold that as if he had been hit in the eyes with acid. Danny made his fiery comeback and brought the people onto the edge of their seats. DD climbed to the top rope and hit Sid with a dropkick. That was Sid's one-and-only bump for the match. As Sid lay prone on the mat, DD covered him, while the referee counted, 1 … 2 … Before the referee could reach the count of three, I was in the ring, kicking Danny in the head. The referee called for the bell and a disqualification of Lord Humongous.

After the bell, Sid continued to lay on the mat, while DD grabbed me and prepared to hit me with a knockout blow. Just before he landed the punch,

Sid got up and kicked him in the gut. As DD bent over, Sid pulled him into position and brought him up and down with the devastating power bomb.

As the bell rang repeatedly, we made our way to the dressing room amidst a chorus of cat-calls and boos. For the next month, we did that same, exact match in every town we hit, and it worked on every level. Sid left Danny laying; Danny got his hand raised; and I was approaching my old Memphis level of heat. Most important of all, we were all making money. The CCW had a $40 nightly minimum, which sucked, but eight out of 10 times, the payoff was anywhere from $100 to $250, so everything was fine. Danny Davis was a great opponent for Sid.

I only had one problem during that time. At times when we were alone, Sid had a tendency to exhibit irrational behavior, and whenever that happened, it was really scary. One day, when we walked into the old Delchamps supermarket on Roebuck Parkway in Birmingham, Sid and I went our

separate ways to buy our items. After I found everything I needed, I paid for my purchases, took them out to the car, and went back inside the store to look for Sid. I looked up and down every aisle, but I couldn't find him anywhere. I decided to go back outside and wait for him by the car, knowing that sooner or later, he had to show up. Just as I was about to walk out the door, somebody grabbed my arm and shoved me up against a wall. "Hey, mister," hollered my assailant. "We don't put up with shoplifting in this store. "Stay still while I search you, you son-of-a-bitch."

My assailant, of course, was Sid, but everybody in the store came to a complete standstill to watch the drama that was unfolding. After Sid frisked me from head to toe, he slapped me in the face (easily, I must admit), and announced to the growing crowd that I must have ditched my stolen item. After advising me to change my stealing ways, he turned and walked out the door, leaving me standing there looking as foolish as Bastian Booger in a bodybuilding contest. When I got into the car, I

was furious. I told Sid how upset and embarrassed I was by what he did. Little did I know, the more I complained, the more it egged him on.

That night, on our way back home from Chattanooga, Sid really hit a new high (or low, depending on how you look at it). We stopped for gas and snacks at a truckstop in Georgia. As I pumped gas into my Lincoln, Sid went inside to buy his drink and snacks. When I finished, I went inside to pay for the fuel to get my own goodies. Since we didn't go inside together, nobody knew that Sid and I even knew each other, let alone were traveling together. That was all Sid needed as an incentive. There must have been 75 truck drivers milling around in the truck stop that night, and I don't think there was a one of them who didn't hear Sid holler out, "Hey, you! What do you mean all truck drivers are queers?"

Of course, I hadn't said that, or anything like it, but Sid didn't stop there. "You little bastard. How dare you say that 18-wheelers

should be illegal? If I wasn't in a hurry to get home to my wife and children, I'd kick your ass right now!" He then walked out the door and left me alone with what looked like the cast of the movie, Deliverance. To add salt to the already gaping wound, when I walked outside, Sid, who had a spare set of keys to my Lincoln, got in my car and drove it off to parts unknown, leaving me standing in the parking lot like a man with no country. As a group of a dozen or so truckers hovered around me, muttering comments and threats, I not only started nervously twitching, but I began whistling through my rectum. I had no doubts that I was going to get my ass whipped, and even if I didn't, I wasn't sure if I would ever see Sid or my car again. Once again, at the moment of truth, Sidney drove up and screeched to a halt beside me. "Get in the car, you little twerp." I had barely settled into the front passenger seat when Sid took off with a squeal of tires.

As he drove away, I began to wonder if it was all worth it. Once again, I found myself thinking about

calling Lawler to see how things looked in Memphis. If Sid wasn't off balance enough when he was in a good mood, I could only imagine what he would be like when he was in a bad mood. I didn't have to imagine for long. I would find myself in that position many times.

The first time I saw Sid's mean side was one night after a spot show in east Tennessee. I will admit, freely, that my actions were the foundation for his rage that night, but nevertheless, it was still scary. We were very close to the Great Smoky Mountains National Park and we had to make a 300-plus-mile trip back to Birmingham. I had never been to that part of our country, although I had always wanted to. I told Sid earlier that night that I wanted to take a detour through western North Carolina and spend the night in Bryson City, then check out the mountain area before we went back to Birmingham on the following morning. He didn't want to do that. He wanted to get back to Birmingham so he could do his daily workout routine. When Sid made up his mind, there were

no arguments. I was really pissed, but I didn't say anything. I had a plan, and what he didn't know, wouldn't hurt him.

Sid always woke up in the morning at 4:30 to go work out, so after the show each night, he laid back and went right to sleep while I drove. That night was no exception. I wanted to see the mountains, so I figured that since Sid was fast asleep, there wouldn't be any harm in taking a detour through the mountains of North Carolina. I would take NC Highway 28, make connections on several U.S. highways in Tennessee, before arriving back on the interstate and heading back towards Birmingham … with Sid being none the wiser.

That turned out to be a serious error in thinking on my part. Yes, I enjoyed seeing the splendor of the Smoky Mountains, and it's an experience I recommend to everyone. However, never do it when you have a sleeping, psychotic giant at your side, especially if the giant doesn't want to go there.

My problems began about the time I turned back onto NC Highway 28. State troopers were blocking the entrance to the highway. "Turn around and go back," the trooper said as he walked up to my car.

"What?" I wondered out loud. They explained that the road was blocked by snow and ice. As I pulled away, my sasquatch friend woke up slightly, asking where we were and what was going on. "There's nothing to worry about," I answered. "We just have to make a detour." Thankfully, he went right back to sleep.

The troopers gave me an alternate route back into Tennessee, a route that would get us back to the interstate, and, eventually, to Birmingham. However, as I've done so many times in my life, I misread the directions and wound up 200 miles away in South Carolina. When I realized how far away I was from Birmingham, I started to panic. I turned around and tried to make some progress towards

Birmingham, but I wound up right back in the heart of the Smoky Mountains. Like clockwork, about 4:30, the sleeping giant woke up and asked where we were. I know this is hard to believe, but we were right back in the town where we had wrestled the previous night–300 miles from Birmingham!

I was never so afraid in my life as I was at that point. It was worse than a slow, painful death. When Sid realized where we were, the look on his face would have melted the iceberg that sank the Titanic. I had never been that scared in my life. Sid had a "truth serum" look, one that wouldn't allow you to lie to him. It made you feel that if you lied to him, he would rip out your guts and mix them in with his protein shake. I knew that telling him the sad truth was in my best interest. In tears (literally), I spilled my guts. At that point, Sid's look went from truth serum to lethal injection. All Sid managed to spit through his clenched teeth was, "Get me back to Birmingham … NOW!"

As I silently drove through the pre-dawn, Smoky Mountain country, with the mountain streams flowing freely near the winding roads, Sid woke up again and told me to stop so he could take a leak. I had to go as well, so as we stood silently in the Smoky Mountain mist, bleeding our lizards into the shallow ditch beside the road, Sid looked down at the rapidly-flowing, mountain stream, and in a low voice, said, "If I were to throw you over that embankment onto the rocks in the stream below, the rushing water would carry your body hundreds of miles away. They'd never be able to pin it on me. More than likely, they'd think you were a hiker who accidentally fell to your death."

Suddenly, I was through pissing and I was back in the car. Six hours later, we were back in Birmingham, and none too soon.

Sid didn't speak to me for the rest of that week, even though we shared such close quarters and worked together. Occasionally, he would look at me with an evil sneer on his face, and he would

pull his finger across his throat, but that was the extent of our communication. We still traveled together, alternating cars, but we did it in an uncomfortable silence. I was really getting creeped out.

That Saturday night, we were in Dothan, Alabama, one of our better towns. The house was practically a sellout, and Sid and DD (and me) tore down the house. As we silently left the arena and started back towards the Magic City, Sid broke the silence. He told me that I had been an idiot for "seeing the mountains" like I did, but he actually felt bad about denying me something that might have been a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity. He was beginning to understand why I had done what I did, and he forgave me.

I felt so much better. It was like a weight had been lifted from my shoulders. When we left Dothan, Sid and I each bought a 6-pack, then climbed into his car, a fairly-new 1985 Oldsmobile Cutlass, to make the trip home. Sid

was driving. Whenever we finished a bottle of beer, we would throw the empty bottles at road signs. Sid threw his bottles out of his window, and I threw my bottles out of mine. That was fun … until a miscommunication came into play and ruined the truce we had just reached an hour or so before.

Sid told me to roll down my window because he wanted to try hitting a sign by throwing a bottle through my window all the way from his side. I thought he was kidding, so I didn't roll down the window. That was a big mistake on my part. Without even looking, Sid slung his empty bottle of "Mickey" towards what he thought was an open passenger side window. I'm sure you can imagine what happened next. Broken glass from the beer bottle, shattered shards of glass from the window, blasts of cold, wintertime Alabama air, and one petrified, little redneck all shared that passenger seat deep in South Alabama. I was stunned to the point of being speechless. Sid pulled the car over and just looked at me, in

terrifying silence. In an unexpectedly calm voice, Sid asked me why I didn't roll down the window like he had asked. When I told him I thought he was joking, he calmly explained that if he had been joking, he would have laughed after I had rolled down the window and told me to roll it back up.

Well, I knew there would be a price to pay, and I was ready for whatever Sid had in store for me, short of a slow, painful death. However, I was shocked when Sid took it a lot better than I thought he would. He told me that since the next day was Sunday (and it was a day off for us), and that no auto-glass places would be open, he was going to make the 260-mile trip to West Memphis to see his father-in-law, Bobby Estes, who owned a car lot there, and who would know somebody who would replace the glass on Sunday. Sid actually told me that since he didn't look at the window before he threw the bottle, he accepted 50 percent of the responsibility for the incident. He expected me to pay one-half of the cost of the new window, plus one-half of the gas it would take for the round trip

to West Memphis and back. I readily accepted the deal. It was much better than strangulation and mutilation.

Before he left, we fashioned a makeshift "window" out of Hefty trash bags to keep some of the wintry air out of the car. I stayed in Birmingham to do our laundry and straighten up our living quarters. Sid later told me that the constant rattling, whooshing, and blowing of the hefty bag on the 260-mile adventure made him wish he had brought me with him, in his words, "so I could put you in front of the car and run you over repeatedly." Let this serve as a lesson to you: no matter how stupid it may sound, if you are ever traveling with a giant, short-tempered, sasquatch, roll down the window when he advises you to do so. This advice won't apply to 99.9 percent of anyone in the world, but if you fall into that .1 percent, you'll wish you had heeded my warning. And if that happens, you'll thank me one day.

When Sid returned to the Magic City, he was in a good frame of mind. He had spent some time with his beautiful wife, Sabrina, and his young son, Frankie, and it put him in a great mood. Now it was time to get back to work. We had to drive to Newport, Tennessee, for a big show featuring the CCW talent (the Alabama end of the territory) and the Continental Wrestling Federation [CWF] talent (the Knoxville end of the territory), as well as a few big names brought in to hot-shot the card, such as Kerry von Erich, Dennis Condrey, and one old, washed-up guy who I never thought I'd see again (and wouldn't, after this week), Jonathan Boyd.

Jonathan looked like hell. His eyes were so yellow that I thought he had jaundice or some type of kidney failure, and his skin had a grey pallor similar to that of a corpse. He talked (actually, ranted is a better word) in a rambling, incoherent manner, much worse than when I last saw him in Memphis. The only thing he said that I really understood was his constant repetition of how much he'd done for me, and how I owed him a

night out drinking. Sid finally told me that Jonathan might get off my back if I would just go ahead and drink with him. Since we were staying in Knoxville until the next day, I told Jonathan that I would.

It was sad to see how far down old Boyd had sunk. At one time, he had been a top, independent wrestler and a booker. When I had last seen him in Memphis, he was a mean-spirited, old, son-of-a-bitch with a violent streak. Now, he was nothing more than a broken-down old sot who the Fullers were booking out of sympathy. I no longer resented him for the way he had treated me in Nashville. I only felt sorrow and pity for him.

I'm happy to say that nothing noteworthy happened that night at the Desperado club in Knoxville. We simply sat and drank beer for several hours, with Jonathan drinking two to my every one. He told me the following night's shot in Knoxville was to be his final match in the business, and he was moving to Portland, Oregon,

to manage a motorcycle bar. I never saw Jonathan again after the show in K-Town. I later heard that Jonathan died of a heart attack on August 7, 1999, in Oregon. Bless his heart. Or, should I say, God rest his soul. Jonathan was a no-good, atheist bastard, so I'm sure he's not with God, which is unfortunate.

Now that I've got that off my chest, let me get back to me, Sid, the CCW/CWF territory, and the big show in Knoxville.

Sid worked with a guy named Doug Furnas that night, and it was actually a pretty good match. Furnas was an alumni of the University of Tennessee, which is located in Knoxville, so he got a great reaction, and that made the match easy for Sid. The CCW and CWF were about to permanently split. Ron Fuller and Ronnie West would be taking over the Knoxville end of the territory (now a territory in and of itself), while Robert Fuller, Jimmy Golden, and new owner David Woods would be running the Alabama

territory, now known as the CWF. Since we would be working for Woods, Sid and I wouldn't be returning to Knoxville, so Sid was asked to lay down in the middle and give Furnas a clean win. To his credit, Sid did exactly what was asked of him and they had a good match.

After getting our payoff (which was very good), we changed and got ready to make the 240-mile trip back to Birmingham. As we exited the Coliseum, I stopped to talk with the Rock 'n' Roll RPMs in the parking lot. I had been with Mike Davis and Tommy Lane for a long time ago in Memphis, and it was my first time to see them in quite some time. During the show, we had all been too busy to stand around and reminisce, so the parking lot was a good place to run down memory lane.

Unbeknownst to me, Sid had continued walking to his car, but he couldn't get in because I had the keys. Sid still had the hockey mask on over his face (in order to protect the Hugo gimmick), so he

had a very limited line of vision, and virtually no peripheral vision. The problem began when about 40 fans gathered around him, taunting, grabbing, and poking at him. Sid finally threw his bag to the ground and waved his arms around in the air, in the hopes of scaring away the fans. Bear in mind that Sid had very limited vision due to the mask he was wearing, so he didn't see a baby that a woman was holding, and he accidentally hit it in the face. When that happened, the fans turned into a bloodthirsty gang and their mood turned ugly. As the people started talking about going to their cars to get bats and tire tools, Sid groped blindly through his bag and found his spare set of keys. He threw his bag into the backseat, got into the driver's seat, and peeled out directly towards me.

I didn't know what had happened at the other end of the dimly-lit parking lot, but when Sid's car came screeching towards me, I had a feeling it wasn't anything good. "Get in the fu–ing car now!" he yelled. For some reason, I thought it might be a good idea to do as he said. I threw my bag into the

car and was halfway into the passenger seat when Sid stepped on the accelerator. The tires screeched and we bounced over a curb as he took off into the night. I didn't know what I had done, but I truly believed Sid was going to kill me that night, and I was almost correct in my assumption. However, he wasn't going to do it in a car accident.

When we were clear of the Coliseum, Sid began berating me, and in a very angry, almost insane tone of voice, he told me in great detail about what had taken place in the parking lot just a few short minutes before. "Sid, I'm sorry …" I offered, but he cut me off in mid-sentence.

"Sorry! Sorry? Is that supposed to help? I hit a fu–ing baby because you were fu–ing standing the fu– around instead of getting in the fu–ing car!"

"But, Sid. I was talking to the RPMs because I haven't seen them for a while, and ..."

At that point, Sid snapped, and in a combination of being insane with anger and not knowing just how inhumanly strong he was, he screamed, "Fu– the RPMs, and fu– you!" He grabbed me by the back of my head with his right hand, forced my head down between my knees, and held it there with all of his strength. I struggled to straighten up, but his brute force was inescapable. As my oxygen supply dwindled, my head felt as if it was going to explode, and I started to black out. Just before I passed out, Sid released his death grip on my neck and let me go.

During the time he held me in that position (which seemed to be a long time, but probably was less than 30 seconds), my whole life, especially my life with Sid, flashed before my eyes, and it wasn't pleasant. The time that he jokingly (or so I thought, anyway) threatened to throw me into the rapids in North Carolina came back to me, and I now believed in my heart that Elvis and I were about to finally meet face to face, because I thought I was a goner. I truly believed he was going to kill

me. I'm not kidding about the Elvis thing. Elvis has always been, and still is, my idol, and in that delusional, semi-blackout state I was in right before I blacked out, I swear I heard Elvis calling me to come and meet him. Don't get me wrong. I'm a good Catholic and a Christian, but for some reason, it wasn't Jesus calling me home. It was Elvis! That's a true (but very odd) story.

While I groggily sat up and attempted to compose myself, Sid also acted as if he was trying to regain some semblance of composure. He told me he didn't mean to hurt me, but that what I did was unacceptable. I was there to take care of him, not the RPMs or anyone else. In turn, Sid said he was going to take care of me. I wasn't quite sure how he meant that, but I prayed that it was in a good way.

After several uncomfortable miles, Sid pulled off an exit and into the parking lot of a convenience store. "Why don't you go inside, get a 6-pack, and

come back out and relax while I drive us home." Those were the amazing things about Sid: his Jekyll-and-Hyde personality and 180-degree mood swings. As far as Sid was concerned, the matter had been forgotten. Me, I would never forget. How could I? I was really getting homesick for the Memphis area, and now that I had saved almost $30,000 (a fortune for someone in my position, trust me), I wanted to return to DeSoto County and start setting up a homestead.

I remained in the CWF with Sid, but I was living in constant fear. I was almost like an abused "spouse," if you will. I was too scared to leave. I was also afraid to call Memphis to see about going back, because I felt that if the news got back to Sid, he might kill me. I literally feared for my life. Thankfully, there weren't any more incidents of that magnitude, but there was never a dull moment. Sid's temper was like a firecracker with a very short fuse in a room full of smokers. You never knew when it would explode. And explode it did, but not always with me.

Wendell Cooley was the next victim of what I called a Sid-snappage. Just like the incidents that involved me, that I freely admit weren't always entirely without merit on Sid's part, Wendell brought a great deal of Sid's wrath upon himself.

We were working the Civic Center in Marianna, Florida, and Sid was booked against Wendell in a middle-of-the-card match. In other words, there was no angle or issue between Wendell and Sid, so it wasn't a featured match. It was just a match to entertain the people. Sid and Danny Davis had never worked together in Marianna, so Sid told me he wanted to do the exact same match with Wendell that he had done all around the horn with Danny. I liked the idea, but unfortunately, Wendell saw things a bit differently.

Marianna was one of those towns where the heels and babyfaces dressed in separate rooms, and on opposite sides of the building, so the only time you saw your opponent was when you were in the ring. On this night, the referee, John Keaton, was

responsible for carrying the finishes from one dressing room to the other, and relaying questions or comments back and forth. Wendell's comments didn't exactly endear him to Sid. John told us that Wendell didn't like the opening part of the match that involved me, and he wasn't going for it. Keep in mind that Wendell didn't "ask" if we would mind changing the opening, nor did he offer alternatives or concessions, and he wasn't going to compromise. He just refused to do what we had asked.

When John finished relating Wendell's comments, I saw a glimmer of something dark in Sid's eyes, and I knew there was nothing but trouble ahead. In a way, I selfishly enjoyed the fact that Sid's rage wasn't directed at me, and it gave me a strange sense of relief. Sid told me to go to the ring as planned, and make the same speech to Wendell that I normally made to DD. He would take it from there. I wasn't quite sure what Sid was going to do, but I knew that if Wendell went with the program, everything would be fine. If he didn't …

well, I didn't want to know. I hoped Wendell would do as we asked, just to avoid any ruckus, but knowing Wendell, I didn't think that was going to happen.

As I began my speech, Wendell snatched the microphone away from me (which really pissed me off because that was my time for the spotlight) and said he wasn't going to waste his time wrestling me. He wanted Lord Humongous, and if Hugo was too scared to wrestle him, then the referee might as well just go ahead and raise his hand. Sid whispered, "Get out of the ring," and signaled for John Keaton to have Murray von Torberg (the timekeeper) ring the bell to start the match. I guess Wendell thought Sid had acquiesced to his demands because he started to lock up with Sid as if nothing had happened. That was a big mistake. Sid grabbed Wendell in a shooting full nelson and clamped down, pushing down on the top of Wendell's head and forcing his chin into his chest. That action, of course, cut off Wendell's oxygen and knocked him unconscious.

When Wendell regained his senses, he was laying in the ring by himself. Sid and I were already back in the dressing room. The match had been declared a no contest by the announcer, and trust me, "no contest" is exactly what it was. Wendell never said anything to Sid about the matter. Nobody did.

The following week, Danny Davis dropped the Southeastern title to Sid. Sid and Danny were now working a serious program, so we left out the comedy opening that we had used in their previous matches. After a good, solid match, Danny became the first regular in the territory to fall victim to the dreaded power bomb. The referee counted 1-2-3 and Sid was the new champion.

The CCW belt, which had been the number one title in Alabama, was now held by Buddy Landel in the Knoxville territory, so the Southeastern title was now the top strap in the Alabama territory. The money was good. More importantly, Sid and I were getting along well and

without any incidents.

The next program for Sid was against Scott Hall. Scott was a very interesting guy. I like him, but he seemed to be in a world of his own. When Scott would meet someone, he would greet them with, "Yo, dude!" To this day, I firmly believe that anyone who uses the word "dude" is about three bricks shy of a load. If you want somebody to take you seriously, don't use the word "dude." You'll never hear Vince McMahon call someone "dude," nor will you ever hear Jerry Lawler, Jim Ross, Pat Patterson, Jerry Jarrett, or anyone else who isn't on his own personal planet, refer to someone as "dude." Bruce Prichard, however, uses "dude" all the time. Go figure.

Anyway, Robert Fuller wanted to build the feud between Sid and Scott into a big money angle. We shot the angle in Columbus, Mississippi. Robert Fuller correctly suggested that, as a heel, I needed to hide my true feelings about Mississippi. Rather than being from "downtown Jackson, Mississippi,"

as I had been billed previously, I would now be billed from my other semi-hometown: "Fort Duquesne Boulevard, downtown Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania." I would also have to act like I absolutely "hated" everything about the state of Mississippi. That was one of the hardest things I ever had to do, by far. I had nothing but bad memories of Pittsburgh, and nothing but love for the state of Mississippi, but I had to portray the exact opposite. Somehow, I got it over. Was I good? Ahem … yes, I was.

Scott and Sid had some very good matches. No matter what anybody says about Scott, he has always been a good performer in the ring. It was his out-of-the-ring activities that caused him his problems. At this stage, however, he and Sid were working together very well. Up to this point, Robert hadn't let Sid bump for anyone, but Scott was big enough and over enough to be the first to give Sid some bumps in a match. DD bumped Sid, but only one time per match, which set up the finish. After a long, hard-fought match, Scott

would go for his coup de grâce, the flying forearm, similar to Tito Santana's WWF finish. When Scott dropped Sid and covered him, I would come in for the disqualification. Scott "almost won the belt" every night for the next two weeks, but I would always mess things up for him.

When I did my TV interviews, I would really give it to Gordon Solie, and he worked so well with me. Gordon was absolutely, positively, without a doubt, no questions asked, the best TV wrestling commentator and interviewer of his or any other time. Like Jim Ross today, Gordon didn't mind being the brunt of the heel's pointed comments. Ego had no place in Gordon's repertoire, unlike practically 90 percent of the guys in the business today. "Downtown Bruno, my friend. It looks like you and Lord Humongous have made a serious enemy in Scott Hall."

"I wasn't aware that you and I were friends, Gordon, you little peon."

And then we were off and running. By the time we got the "hook," I had insulted Gordon, Scott Hall, the state of Mississippi, and everybody who lived in Alabama, Georgia, and Florida (the states promoted by the CWA). As Hugo and I walked off the set, Gordon would make a caustic observation about my comments, and with a disgusted look on his face, throw to the ring for the introductions of the next bout.

I was getting a lot of heat during those early days. One day, I found out just how much heat I really had, and it was serious heat. Traveling alone, I was driving through Starkville, Mississippi, on my way to Columbus for that night's show. Sid had to drive back to Arkansas for personal business after the matches that night, so he had driven his car, as well. My plans were to stay in Columbus after the show, and drive from there to the next night's town, Shannon, Mississippi, where I was booked as a special heel referee in Robert Fuller's match with Steve Armstrong. It was, more or less, a charity booking

from the office, instead of leaving me with a day off.

I pulled into the parking lot of a convenience store to fuel up my Lincoln. As I innocently filled up the "big white bird," a rough-looking fellow approached me. "You're fu–ing Downtown fu–ing Bruno from the fu–ing TV wrestling show, ain't you?" asked the stranger.

Well, I didn't realize that I had all that fu–ing in me, but I answered, "Yes, I am."

As I replaced the gas cap, he walked over to me and grabbed my arm, quite forcefully I might add. "So you fu–ing think all us Mississippi folks are fu–ing idiots, huh?"

Little did he know that not only was I from Mississippi (more or less), but I had a deep love for the state. He also didn't realize that he wasn't a shining example of the people who populate our fine state. "No, no. Not at all," I said, as I slowly

eased away from him. As I started to get into my car, he grabbed me again, much more forcibly than the first time, and spit a tobacco-laced wad of sputum into my face. He told me he was going to take me out before Scott Hall or Danny Davis had the chance. I'll be perfectly honest. I wouldn't have stood a chance with the guy. He was a big, mean, dumb, foul-mouthed, country redneck, who either knew that I didn't have a gun, or (even more scary) didn't care.

Just as I was about to get my ass whipped, or maybe even have my throat cut, my savior appeared. Not in the form of Jesus, but in the form of a big, stout, older, black gentleman. That man, however, probably saved me from meeting Jesus that day. Bear in mind that in that day and age, and especially in that part of the country where wrestling was just about the only regular entertainment available, just about everybody knew the CWF characters. In their eyes, we were all big stars. Not only did the mean guy know who I was, but so did the older gentleman. He walked

over to me, put his hand on my shoulder, and asked, "Have you fed the horses yet?"

I gave him an understandably confused look. He gave me a knowing look, and repeated the question. I caught on. "No, not yet," I said.

"Well, get down there and feed them, boy," he chastised me. He told the redneck that he was so sick of me pretending to be Downtown Bruno just because I looked like "him." It was distracting me from my job, which was tending to his animals. The Mississippi idiot, who only minutes before had spit into my face, said, "Yeah. He don't even look that much like Downtown Bruno!"

As Bugs Bunny used to say, "What a maroon." How could I not look like Downtown Bruno when I was Downtown Bruno?

As the redneck walked away, the gentleman who saved my ass, if not my life, told me that I needed to hurry up and get on my way, and that it probably

wasn't a good idea to stop in small, backwater towns. I thanked him and we shook hands. He never told me his name, so to this day, I don't know who saved me, or why he intervened, but I owe him a lot, possibly my life. If you are reading this, I hope that God has blessed you. I have never forgotten what you did for me.

This brings me to the issue of racism, which is something that has bothered me for my entire life, and I hope you, dear reader, don't mind me taking the time to address that here in my humble memoir. I think the story I just told you will serve as an appropriate example for what I'm about to say. There I was, in east Mississippi, in the heart of the Deep South. Starkville was more than 170 miles from DeSoto County, so it wasn't exactly my backyard, but it was still a part of my home state. Mississippi has always taken a bad rap as being a very racially divided state, and granted, at one point, it was just that. But here it was, in the late '80s, and look what happened. A dried-up, skinny redneck was almost (possibly) killed by a

big, ugly redneck. We were both white, and I was saved by a good Samaritan, who was black.

This should serve as a lesson to everybody, not only about racism, but about stereotypes. Racism, in every form and fashion, is wrong. If a white person discriminates against a black person, it's wrong. Dead wrong. Likewise, if a black person discriminates against a white person, it's also wrong. In the racially turbulent 60's, it was wrong. In the Disco 70's, it was wrong. In the New-Wave 80's, in the final years of the millennium, and here in the 21st century, it's wrong. There is no such thing as reverse discrimination, either. It's racism, plain and simple, and it's wrong.

Which brings me to FUBU: FUBU is a hip-hop-style, urban-clothing line, designed by black folks, for black folks. FUBU actually stand for For Us By Us, "us" being black people. Basically, it stands for "Fu– White People." That is wrong, just as it's wrong when white folks discriminate

against blacks. Discrimination and racism is stupid, and in case I haven't said it before, it's wrong. Bubba Ray Dudley was walking around the dressing room one day wearing a FUBU jersey. Here you have a big, fat, out-of-shape, white guy wearing a shirt that the very designers don't want white people to buy, own, or wear. I never saw somebody support a company that is against his own race. Would Bubba Ray's partner, D-Von Dudley, wear a "Support the Ku Klux Klan" shirt? Or course not. So why would Bubba Ray Dudley wear a FUBU shirt? And they say we're mentally slow here in Mississippi. You'd never catch anybody in DeSoto County wearing a FUBU shirt. The same thing happened several years ago when the Malcolm X craze hit. They began to produce X hats, X shirts, etc. Malcolm X hated white people, so I was angered when I saw white people wearing X shirts. I finally went and got my own X — a rebel flag tattoo on my left shoulder with the word "Mississippi" printed on a ribbon through the center. Like the saying goes, "Heritage, not hate."

Okay, I'm going to get down from my soap box and get back to the CWF.

Sid and I really bonded, and we became quite close, even though a few more incidents came to pass, such as the time we stopped on the side of the road near Opp, Alabama, to bleed our lizards. It was about eleven o'clock at night and it was pitch dark. Finishing before me, Sid jumped into the car and took off, leaving me all alone, pissing in the dark. I had no idea what could have been going through Sid's mind. I only hoped he wasn't getting even for the incidents, imagined or otherwise, that had taken place during the previous months. Above the sounds of the crickets chirping and my footsteps crunching on the Alabama gravel, I heard a car engine racing and wheels screeching. My heart raced with fear because I couldn't see the car. When the car came to within 50 yards of where I stood, a set of high beams lit the darkness and headed straight towards the shoulder of the road where was standing. Panickinge, I dove over the steep

embankment. I rolled, slid, tumbled, and bounced for what seemed like an eternity, until I finally slid to a stop at the bottom of the gulley in a muddy ditch. I cursed Sid for leaving me alone and putting me in that awful predicament. What kind of a sadistic, no-good, evil bastard would run somebody off the road and into a ditch? The next sound I heard was Sid's high-pitched, maniacal laugh. I now knew that the sadistic, no-good, evil bastard was my traveling partner. I should have known that it was Sid, but in the terror of the moment, I hadn't been thinking rationally.

I stood up and carefully started to slog my way up the muddy hillside. My nice, white suit with blue pinstripes, which cost over $90 at the Sears Outlet store, was a torn-up, tattered, ripped, muddy, stained mess, as was most of my body, I might add. When I stumbled and slid back down the hill, Sid became more hysterical with laughter. When I finally reached the top, I shook my head and started to get back into the monster's car. He immediately quit laughing and said, "No way! You're not

getting in my car all muddy like that." I was beside myself. It was his fault that I was muddy! He finally told me that he was joking and let me get into the car. I knew better than to raise hell about anything he did to me, so I just sat in silence. Once again, I was thinking about calling Memphis.

Eventually, something else happened that caused me to do just that. I was tired of always living on the edge with Lord Humongous, but my reasons for calling Memphis were quite different than having problems with Sid. I called because of something that Robert Fuller did.

Robert meant well, but meaning well isn't always good enough when you're running a business. When you're the booker of a wrestling organization, you have to eat, sleep, drink, and breathe the wrestling business, like Jim Ross did when he was the Executive Vice President for Talent Relations for the WWF/WWE. The testament to his efforts is reflected in the level of success the company reached when he was in

charge. Robert, on the other hand, while he was (and still is) a great guy, had the maturity and common sense of an 8-year-old — an 8-year-old with a serious drinking and pill problem, I might add, and that wasn't very conducive to good business.

Business dropped off at an alarming rate when the CCW and CWF split. Each organization lost half of their talent and half of their towns. We had to run the towns on the Alabama end more often now, and with a diluted product, our business suffered. Owner David Woods brought in a trouble-shooter in an attempt to help revitalize the business, an old-timer from Bill Watt's territory, Jack Curtis, who I liked and respected a lot. Jack analyzed what was wrong almost immediately: the booker. Once again, let me repeat what I said earlier. Robert was a great guy, but business didn't seem to be very high on his list of priorities. His priorities included beer, playing crazy 8's, singing, and shooting pool. On the other hand, I liked Jack, but he had his quirks, as

well. He tended to be a bit cocky and abrasive at times. I knew Jack was going to be trouble for Robert, but I didn't know how soon it would all come to a head.

One night in Prattville, Alabama, Jack took, in my opinion, the wrong approach to handling a situation with Robert. It concerned our paychecks for the previous weeks. As we all sat in the common area behind the dressing room area, Wendell Cooley questioned Robert about his payoff for the previous week's show in Columbus. The house had been up from the previous week, and the number of guys on the card were the same as the previous week, but the payoff was down. "No, it's not, Wendell," exclaimed Robert, with a defensive tone to his voice. "I paid you $125, just like last week."

"Bullsh–, Rob," countered Wendell. "This time, I only got 85 bucks!"

Knowing full well that he paid Wendell a buck

and a quarter, Robert offered to pull out his payoff book to prove it. That was when Jack Curtis stepped in, and that was when the chaos in Alabama began. "Oh, didn't you know?" asked Jack rhetorically. "David Woods gave me the authority to change your payoffs."

Robert answered, "No, I didn't know that, but now that I do know, I won't be making any more payoffs."

Then, in a very callous and un-businesslike move, in my opinion, Jack said, "That's okay. I'll handle the payoffs for the next three weeks until the new booker comes in."

That was the first time that Robert, or any of us for that matter, had heard anything about a new booker, and it shouldn't have been announced like that. Again, I have to admit that I liked Jack, and I thought he had a good mind and demeanor for the business, but that was disrespectful. I'm surprised that Robert didn't slap him. Jimmy Golden wanted

to, but Robert stepped in front and stopped him. Jack wouldn't tell us who the new booker was going to be, but a week later, we were told that it was going to be Eddie Gilbert. I had met Eddie in Memphis a few years before, but I didn't really know him, so I was ambivalent, and took a wait-and-see attitude. I became quite opposed to what happened next, however.

A few weeks later in Montgomery, who walks into the dressing room — Paul Heyman! Paul E. Dangerously. I just about crapped my pants. What I soon learned made matters even worse. Not only was Paul E. in the CWF as a manager, but he was the assistant booker, the booker's manager, and the chief office stooge.

I had been the one-and-only heel manager in the CWF, and I was doing very well. I also knew that the territory wasn't big enough for two managers, especially when Paul E. was going to be Eddie's personal manager. He would get the big push and the high-profile matches. I didn't stand a chance,

so I knew immediately that it was time to leave. For the first time in my career, I didn't have an immediate place to go, which meant that in order to keep working and paying my bills, I had to take whatever I could get.

I called a good friend of mine, Bobby Jaggers, who was working in Memphis (the old CWA, which was now called the USWA), and asked him to talk to Randy Hales to see if I was welcome to come back to Memphis, and if there was a spot open for me. He told me he'd call me back after he talked to Randy. In the meantime, I told Robert that I had put the word out that I wanted to go home and work for Lawler and Jarrett again. Robert put the kibosh on that idea. "Hell, no, boy! Don't do that. I've got somethin' a whole lot better lined up for us, Bruno. I'm gonna take you and Jimmy Golden to Texas to work with the Von Erichs. Jimmy'll be my partner and you'll be our manager. It's a done deal. I'm just waitin' for the starting date. Don't worry, Poo-Poo. You're going with me. You're in! Hell, they got national

TV. Now you'll really be getting famous!" (Poo-Poo was an affectionate nickname Robert used for his friends.)

Of course, getting famous never really mattered to me, but it seemed to make Robert happy. I just wanted to make money. A couple of days later, Bobby Jaggers called back, like he promised. Not only did Randy Hales like the idea of bringing me back, but so did Lawler, and the King was actually really fired up about it. I told Jaggers to tell them "thanks, anyway" for me. I was going to World Class (the Texas territory) with Robert, so maybe I'd come back home some other time. Memphis would always be there for me, but going to a brand-new territory, which had nationwide ESPN coverage, was an opportunity I couldn't pass up.

The next night in Wewahitchka, Florida, I called Eddie Gilbert aside and gave him my two-week notice. Eddie was very gracious about it and told me that I could work right up until the last day if I wanted, and I accepted his offer. Robert quit

outright, and spent the next two weeks drinking in his apartment in Hoover, Alabama. At night, I would make the towns, and in the daytime, I would call Rob and ask him for the starting date. He kept putting me off with one excuse after the other. I went from giddiness to frustration, then to concern, and finally into a mild panic. I had quit my job and turned down a good offer in Memphis, and now I couldn't get my starting date.

I finally drove over to Rob's apartment and dropped in unexpectedly. His wife, Sylvia, opened the door and invited me in. Sylvia was a beautiful blonde with a hell of a body. She had the sexiest … rear view you ever saw in your life. As I walked in, Rob, who was evidently very surprised to see me, said that he needed to talk to me. Oh, boy. When a conversation begins like that, it certainly couldn't mean good news was in the offing.

It wasn't.

"Dammit, boy. We got us a problem," said Robert, which I translated to: Bruno has a problem. And I was right. Boy, was I ever right. To make a painfully long story mercifully short, Robert was going to take Sylvia to Texas as his manager, while Jimmy and I would have to find something else to do. I had less than a week remaining in the CWF, and now I didn't have a job lined up. That wasn't Eddie Gilbert's fault. It wasn't Paul E's fault. I don't guess it was even Robert's fault. It was my own fault. What can I say? I should have followed my heart and just gone back to Memphis.

I staggered out of Robert's apartment, not knowing what I was going to do. I had too much pride to go crawling back to Eddie Gilbert. In a subsequent conversation, Bobby Jaggers had told me that Lawler was really pissed when I snubbed their offer to return to Memphis. I was on the very top of their sh– list. The WWF wasn't exactly knocking down my door. Kansas City had closed their doors. Ron Wright, one of the legends in the

days of the old east Tennessee territory, was managing the heels in Knoxville, so there wasn't a spot for me there, either. Sir Oliver Humperdink had Florida sewn up. Verne Gagne's American Wrestling Association promotion was on its last legs. I was really beginning to panic.

Then I got a call from Louis "Lou" Fabiano, a good friend of mine who I had worked with several times over the years. He said a guy named Steve Gatorwolf was running a week-long tour at several Indian reservations in Arizona, and he was looking for a good manager. He was willing to pay $200 a night, plus expenses. I jumped on that offer like a parolee on a prostitute.

While I was waiting for the tour to begin, Jerry Stubbs called me from Lafayette, Louisiana, and told me that he, Buck Robley, Jim Carpenter, and Ed Faulk, were starting a promotion in Louisiana called the IWF. He wanted to know if I would like to come in and be the in-house manager. Great! I was unemployed only in my mind. Not to brag, but

I guess when you're good, work finds you. Ahem! Stubbs worked things out so I could start a week after the end of the Arizona run, so I was set.

I had two shots left in the CWF: Panama City, Florida, and Dothan, Alabama. Eddie Gilbert told me that since we were all staying over in Panama City that night, they were going to have a going-away party for me in his room at the Classic Inn, and he would buy the beer. And boy, was there ever a lot of beer. Eddie filled the bathtub with beer and covered it with ice cubes.

There was quite a crew there to see me off on the eve of my final shot in the CWF: Eddie Gilbert, Paul E. Heyman, Dirty White Boy, Danny Davis, Randy Colley, Sid, Pee Wee Anderson, Rodney Anaoi (Yokozuna, in another life), Tom Prichard, and for a short time, Dirty White Girl (DWB's girlfriend and future wife). It's sad to note that three of my "guests," Rodney, Eddie, and Pee Wee, are now dead. They were only 34, 33, and 41

years old, respectively, when they died. At that point in time, however, they were alive and well, so let's dwell on that. We all talked, laughed, reminisced, and cut up for hours, drinking like the world's supply of beer was going to run out. We were having a ball.

For some reason, after ten beers or so, I was really drunk. Now, as I've admitted, I've been a big beer drinker since I was a teenager. I could (and still can) chug down 10 to 12 beers and not even slur my words. That's why my reaction to the beer strikes me as very odd, even to this day. I was so wasted that I passed out on the floor, sitting upright, with a can of beer in my hand. Eddie dumped a cooler of ice water over my head to revive me, which, at any other time, would have made me jump like a jackrabbit, but it only slightly stirred me up.

Bear in mind that I wasn't in my own room. I was in Eddie's. Nevertheless, I decided to take a bath. That wasn't normal behavior at a party, but I

wasn't my normal self. I went into the bathroom, closed and locked the door, ran the water, and got into the tub. Everybody else just kept drinking and partying. They had more or less forgotten about me. When they needed more beer, Paul E. tried to open the bathroom door, only to discover that it was locked. He knocked and knocked, then he remembered that I had gone in there and began shouting for me to open the door. When I didn't answer after a couple of minutes, Paul E. became concerned and broke the door open with his shoulder. There I was, in all my glory: fully clothed, laying in a bathtub full of water, with beer cans floating alongside me. I had vomited after I got in there. It was in my hair, on my face, floating on the water in the tub, and on the floor of the bathroom. Just as Paul E. walked in, my head went underwater and I started to gasp for air, unsuccessfully. It's true when they say timing is everything, because if Paul E. hadn't broken in when he did, I would have been the fourth dead guy from that party, only I would have been the first to go.

Paul grabbed a towel from the rack and went to work. Wrapping the towel around his hands, he gently reached in and pulled my head above the water, then reached down into the tub and opened the drain to let out the water. After the tub had emptied, I laid there in the empty tub, passed out. Needless to say, the party was over. Paul E. had saved my life. Literally. I've had my share of run-ins with Paul E., and I still do, but he saved my life. Thank you, Paul Heyman. I mean it.

When I woke up in Eddie's bathtub the next morning, I felt as if I had spent the night rolling around in a cement mixer. It was bad. Ten beers never affected me that way, so I know something wasn't right. To this very day, I honestly and truly believe that Dirty White Boy dropped a mickey into my beer. I can't prove it, and I'll never be able to prove it, but, in my opinion, that's what happened. He was the one who kept saying, "Hey, c'mon, Bruno. Drink up! Here's another one." He was just a little too accommodating. Tony, if you put the mickey in my drink, fu– you. If you didn't,

fu– you, anyway, because I'm sure you were at least in on it.

I undressed and showered the mucous off my body, then asked Eddie to go to my room and get my bag, which he did. I put on some non-wet, non-vomit clothes, then I went to the lobby and forced myself to eat breakfast.

When I got to Dothan that night, I still felt really bad. Things quickly got worse when Eddie's dirty, better-off-dead, whore, bitch, slut, scumbag, rotten, douche bag, ugly, sleazy, smelly, (add your own adjectives here), wife, Missy Hyatt, was there to "greet" me. Just in case you can't already tell, let me enlighten you: I didn't particularly care for Missy, and the feeling was mutual. I hated her then and I hate her to this day. I hope she drops dead while she's giving somebody a ten-dollar blowjob. A whore on the street is a much more honest person than Missy Hyatt because at least they admit they suck dicks for money. Missy did the same thing, only she did it under the guise of

getting into the wrestling business, for which she got money. She was an arena rat who was given a ticket to the dressing room. Period. Missy told me that I was making the biggest mistake of my life by quitting on her husband, Eddie. She then told me she hoped I died, along with my family.

I got so upset that I left with no fanfare, no goodbye, no anything. I just left. I hopped into my car and started my 1,700-mile trip to Kingman, Arizona, the site of my first shot on the Indian reservation tour.

Chapter 11
The Louisiana Assassin

I took my time during my drive to Arizona, and stopped off for some well-deserved R&R at several different points. Stopping in Las Cruces, New Mexico, I relaxed by the pool at the Motel 6, ate really well at the Golden Corral, and recovered from my final day(s) in Alabama. I was in the desert, a place where I had never been, and it was a great, new experience. I got sunburned badly while I was there, but it must have been good for me because I felt better than I had in months.

I rolled into Kingman on a Thursday afternoon, about five hours before show time. The crew was already there. Steve Gatorwolf, who was a legitimate Indian (as opposed to the fake pro wrestling Indians) was the first person I met. He was very friendly and seemed genuinely glad to

have me there. Also there was Bill Anderson, a wrestler from southern California who trained Sting and the Ultimate Warrior; Louis Spiccoli, an above-average worker who had a below-average physique and the face of a pig (Not meant to be an insult; he really did look like a pig); Timmy Renesto, a good worker whom I had known from years before in Memphis; my friend Lou Fabiano, a great guy and a good worker from Shirley, Long Island, who could have made it a lot farther in the business if he didn't have a habit of getting married and making babies every year or so; Lance "Machine Gun" Ferrara, a local Arizona boy who was a pretty good hand in the ring; Vinny Valentino, another good hand, who I knew from Kansas City; and a few new guys that I hadn't met before.

The show in Kingman was packed, as were all the shows that week: Kingman, Lake Havasu City, Flagstaff, Williams, Winslow, and Cave Creek. At the end of the tour, Gatorwolf took me to an office in the arena, and handed me my pay envelope. He

told me it included my pay, plus expense money to cover my long trip to Arizona, and the return trip back to the swamp country of south Louisiana. 2,500 bucks! That was the best week I had ever had in the business. He told me he appreciated how hard I had worked that week, and for that reason, I deserved the extra kick. He also wanted me to return for the next tour, which took place once a year. I told him I would be delighted to come back.

Off I went into the desert night, driving my huge Lincoln down I-10 East on the epic 1,500-mile journey from Winslow to Morgan City, Louisiana. I was glad I had a week before I was scheduled to start. I wasn't looking forward to the trip and I wanted to take my time. I stopped in El Paso, which, even though you can't prove it by the population, I'm pretty sure is part of the United States. While there, I had an oil change and a general check-up of my Lincoln, which it passed with flying colors. The days turned into night, the nights turned into day, and I drove and drove and

drove. Then I drove some more. One end of Texas to the other was basically 800 miles of flat, hot, nondescript landscape. The only two major towns I traveled through on I-10 were San Antonio and Houston, and I spent the night in both of those cities.

After a trip that took longer than it took Apollo 11 to get to the moon, I crossed the Texas border at Orange, Texas, and arrived road weary in Lake Charles, Louisiana. I spent the night there before continuing on to my destination. I was as tired as I had ever been in my life, and I slept the sleep of the living dead. When I woke up, I felt rejuvenated and ready to go. After I ate a hearty breakfast, I headed east, stopping only long enough to eat lunch in Lafayette, Louisiana. After driving another 70 miles, I found myself in Morgan City. Morgan City was (and still is, I'm quite sure) a town located on the bank of the Atchafalaya River in southern Louisiana. Approximately (my guesstimate) 95 percent of the population is hardcore Cajun, and the other five percent aren't sure if they are or not.

The IWF was holding their show at the Civic Center, a medium-sized building, and it was set up very nicely for a TV taping. When I walked in, Jerry Stubbs was sitting behind the stage curtain talking to Jim Carpenter and Ed Faulk. I had met Ed several times in the past, but I didn't know Carpenter. Stubbs greeted me and introduced them as co-owners of the promotion. Buck Robley, I was told, had pulled out and left the state, which was probably for the best ('nuff said). Stubbs told me to go ahead and get dressed because they were going to pre-tape promo interviews for some of the upcoming events, and as Stubbs put it, "we want to utilize your ability to talk your ass off."

They then introduced me to my tag team: Mike Roynae, the "Bronx Bomber," and Mike Collins, the "Bronx Bull." I would also be managing Jim "The Rebel" Ryder, a 300-plus-pound singles competitor. I immediately liked the guys. They had good ability and attitudes. I knew we would be able to work well together. They had all heard of me and told me they respected me for the time I

had put into the business. They also admitted that they were green and very inexperienced, and they would appreciate anything I could tell them or teach them. I really appreciated their attitudes, and it made me feel even more special when they said Jerry Stubbs had told them to pay attention to what I told them, because they could learn a lot from me. I'm pretty sure Jerry was talking about my business knowledge, I'm sure he didn't need me to teach them how to get drunk and throw up. I was determined to be on my best behavior, anyway. I had their respect and I didn't want to lose it.

As we started doing our promos, I tried to teach them what I had learned over the years, and to their credit, they absorbed my suggestions like sponges. I explained psychology, and the art of doing a town-specific promo. "Where and when," I stressed to them. The "where and when" is what's important in a promo when you're plugging a town in a small territory.

For example, "Hello, ladies and gentlemen. I'm

David Hightower, the voice of the IWF, reminding you that on Friday night, August 5th, the IWF will be returning to Minden, Louisiana, at the Minden Civic Auditorium, with a bell time of eight p.m. Appearing in Minden on August 5th will be all the top stars of the IWF, including "Iceman" Parsons, Jerry Stubbs, "The Cajun Sensation" Joey Comeaux, Ben Norwood, Reggie B. Fine, and, among others, my guests here on IWF Championship Wrestling, Downtown Bruno and Jim "The Rebel" Ryder. Bruno, on August 5th, your man, the Rebel, will be taking on none other than the great Jerry Stubbs. What are your thoughts on coming into Minden with the Rebel this Friday night?"

"David Hightower. Let me tell you something: I've got August 5th circled on my calendar because August 5th will be the day my man, the Rebel, will put Minden, Louisiana on the map! And on August 5th, Jerry Stubbs will be finished! I hope they have an extra ambulance on hand at the Minden Civic Auditorium because after the Rebel power

slams Stubbs into oblivion, he'll need two rides to the hospital, because he'll be broken in half! Right, Rebel?"

"That's right, Bruno. Stubbs, you better come prepared for a fight on August 5th. In fact, before the match, you better say your goodbyes to all the Minden morons, because you're going down."

"Strong words from a strong man and his little sidekick. We'll see if they can back up those words on August 5th in Minden, Louisiana at the Minden Civic Auditorium. I'm David Hightower, and the IWF on TV will be back after this break with ..." whatever.

That was how you promoted a town on TV in that type of wrestling organization. The guys listened and learned, as did a lot of the other younger guys in the company. Apparently, nobody had ever taken the time to explain things to them. The IWF was a mixture of veterans and rookies. On the veteran side was "Iceman" Parsons, myself, Jerry

Stubbs, Sika the Wild Samoan, Tim Horner, Brad Armstrong, Bob Owens (my old drinking buddy from the early days with Rocky Johnson), and Lou Fabiano, who I got booked there. On the rookie side were a lot of guys who had a lot of potential, and some, truthfully, with absolutely no potential. On the plus side (or the group of guys with potential) were: Rainbow Brown, a young, athletic black fellow from Shreveport; Rude Dog, ditto; Jim "Rebel" Ryder, a 300-plus pound guy with a good attitude and who could move really well for a big guy; Joey Cameaux, a well-built Cajun guy who went on to do well in the Pacific Northwest territory; Reggie B. Fine, who never really made it big, but moved on to the Memphis area and remained a stalwart there for many years; and my "Bronx" team.

My two Mikes had an interesting story. They were actually from Newark, New Jersey, and had been in the Air Force. They were stationed together at the Barksdale Air Force Base in the Shreveport/Bossier City area of Louisiana. When

the IWF promoted a show at the base one night, they attended, and really became intrigued. After the show, which they watched with a great deal of interest, they approached referee Gene Sonnier (pronounced Son-Yay, if it makes for easier reading) and asked him how they could learn to become wrestlers. Sonnier referred them to Ben "The General" Norwood, who had a wrestling school in the Shreveport area. When they had free time, they attended Ben's school, where they learned absolutely nothing. More importantly, they gave Ben a great deal of money. I'm sad to say, but that's true of about 98 percent of the so-called wrestling schools. If you don't pay attention to anything else I've written in this book, pay attention to what I'm about to say, because if you, or anyone you know, is considering a career in this business (although after reading my story, I can't imagine that you are), this is the best advice you will ever receive: Use your head!

Okay, I'll elaborate a bit here, if you insist. If a person has never made a living in our business,

and/or has never made a name for himself, even on a small-scale regional level (especially if it was his full-time living), then how can that person teach you anything about how to get into the business, let alone succeed? That has always been my biggest pet-peeve: guys taking money from guys who want to get into a business that they can't even get into themselves! There are some reputable wrestling schools around, run by guys who know what they are talking about, guys who have actually done something in the business, guys like Jimmy Valiant, Sika Anoai, Bill Dundee, Walter Kowalski, Buddy Wayne, Ken Wayne, Dory Funk Jr., Larry Sharpe, Danny Davis, and Bill Anderson (and in the past, before their untimely deaths, Tojo Yamamoto and Chris Adams). There are other reputable trainers, but those are the ones who come to mind right now. I want to stress that they aren't the only good ones. However, for every Bill Dundee, or Walter Kowalski, there are 200 Ben Norwoods.

My point here is, don't give your money to somebody who isn't qualified to train you, which,

unfortunately, is what my two Yankee friends did. Ben Norwood was a goof who used to take pictures of the IWF wrestlers. He would have 8x10s printed and would give them to the guys. That was his way of getting a foot in the door with the wrestlers. There's a lot of leeches in our business, and some people, like Brutus Beefcake, have made a career out of being one. Norwood weaseled his way into the IWF as a manager, "The GeneraI." He absorbed just enough knowledge of the business by "osmosis" to be able to fake his way through the interviews, ringside behavior, etc., but he really didn't know anything. He wasn't qualified to be at the ring, let alone teach young, impressionable guys, the art of wrestling. That's what he set out to do, however, and the Mikes were the victims (among others who didn't have the talent to get booked into a small promotion like the IWF, or anywhere else, for that matter). Mike and Mike, however, had a good look and a lot of potential. They were big, muscular, athletic guys, with enough intelligence to take what little knowledge they got from Ben

Norwood, and apply it with "on the job training" (learning as they went) to manage to get by. They learned a lot by just observing and listening to veterans like Iceman Parsons and Jerry Stubbs. When I met them, I decided to make it my business to teach them everything I could.

Mike, Mike, and I became travel partners, and as we made trips through the bayous and pine forests, the car became a rolling classroom. I was the drunken professor, while my "students" took turns behind the wheel of either one of their cars or my Lincoln. I told them the real truth about the business, just as I've been doing here in this book, and I held nothing back. I gave them the lowdown about the crooked promoters, the lying bookers, the egotistical wrestlers, the backstabbers and stooges, the closet queers, the lousy payoffs, and the bounced checks. I got the impression they thought the business was going to be a pleasure trip. After a few months in the IWF … boom! It was going to be the World Wrestling Federation, Madison Square Garden, and six-figure incomes. I'm sorry

I had to burst their bubble, but it was for their own good. Perhaps I laid it on a little too thick, because the poor Bomber didn't show up for Ringgold, Louisiana, one night, and I was shocked to find out why. He had quit the business, re-enlisted in the Air Force, and taken an assignment in Germany. He left a note for me with Bronx Bull, thanking me for smartening him up to what he was getting himself into. Wow! My bitching and moaning about the business, while I drank mass quantities of warm beer on car trips, caused a guy with a lot of potential to get out of the business and rejoin the service. What a big mouth I had. I'll bet every time he sees himself not in the main event in Madison Square Garden, he thinks of me. For whatever it's worth, Mike, I'm sorry. Somehow, I don't think he cares, wherever he is.

Business in the IWF was just so-so, with some towns being good, others the sh–ts. Jerry Stubbs eventually gave his notice and went to Alabama to work for Eddie Gilbert, so the booker job came open. You could have knocked me over with a

feather when, of all people, my good friend Mike Davis was hired for the job. I thought that was fantastic news. I really liked and respected Mike, and he and I had been close friends for a long time. I was really excited to see him. When Mike walked into the Minden Civic Auditorium on his first day as a wrestler/booker in the IWF, I was there waiting for him. In typical Mike Davis fashion (he had a very dry, but comical, sense of humor), instead of hugging me or shaking my hand, he just stood and stared at me. With all seriousness, he said, "Well, I see who I'll be giving the first notice to!" Not missing a beat, I replied, "Well, it won't be me, mother fu–er, 'cause I quit."

We both broke into wide grins and hugged each other with real emotion. (Remember, fake hugs suck.) Mike was a great guy and a real friend. We had been through a lot together. He helped me keep my head on straight when Jonathan Boyd went over the coo-coos nest, and he also had been the first person to come to my aid when I gigged

myself too deeply in Memphis and hit a gusher that could have killed me. By the same token, I was always there for Mike, too, such as the time when his wife left him for a guy he thought was his best friend, and the time he talked about suicide (over the same thing). I sat up with him and drank myself sober, letting Mike unburden himself to me about his wife, and how she had broken his heart, and how unfair it was that she had taken his two young daughters, Amber and Kayla, away from him. Mike finally went to sleep about four o'clock. Evidently, my words of encouragement had an effect on him, but by the time I left, I was so depressed that I felt like killing myself. Not really.

I stress the value of our friendship, but having said that, it hurts me to do this. I have to be honest here or there's no point in even writing this book. Mike was a terrible booker, and when it came to managing a wrestling company, Jim Carpenter and Edward Faulk weren't exactly Pat Patterson and Jim Ross. Business, which was never red hot to begin with, really took a

nosedive. The one exception to that statement was Houma, Louisiana, which really was on fire. Every third Sunday, we would pack the house at the Terrebonne Parish Arena, doing so well that the Fire Department actually had to stop the ticket sellers from selling any more tickets. Houma was a real wrestling town, and it was always good for morale to be booked there, knowing a sellout was all but guaranteed.

When Mike took over the booking job, he tackled it with a vengeance. He really meant well and he worked hard, but he just wasn't up to the job. Mike decided that Iceman Parsons was overpaid at $200 bucks a shot, so he offered him an ultimatum of $75 a night. If Iceman didn't want to accept that, then Mike couldn't use him. Naturally, Iceman "melted" from the scene. At the time, Iceman was our most over heel, and he was a big draw for us in the more African-American populated towns, such as Natchitoches and Colfax. As I said previously, business was so-so as it was, and without our top

heel, I didn't see how things were going to turn around. Mike also stopped using Tim Horner and Brad Armstrong, also for monetary concerns. They were the top babyface tag team, so that didn't make a lot of business sense, and we didn't have anybody waiting in the wings who was capable of filling that spot.

For the babyface tag team spot, Mike brought in Allen Martin and teamed up with him as the Rock 'n' Roll RPMs. Allen, of course, wasn't one of the original RPMs. Tommy Lane was, but Tommy had gotten married, got out of the business, and went to work for a trucking company. Allen was a decent worker and one hell of a bumper, but his appearance sucked, and he could neither talk clearly (in or out of the ring) or make an interview, due to some type of speech impediment. That wasn't exactly top guy material. Mike was only 34 years old, but he looked every bit of 50. He was balding and had several teeth missing. On the other hand, Mike was a really good, above-average worker, so I'm sure he could have done

well as a heel, but, as is often the case, "bookeritis" clouded his judgment. He had always dreamed of being a top babyface, and God, hell, or high water, couldn't stop him from putting himself into that position.

The wrestling fans weren't quite sure how to react when Mike and Allen first walked through the curtain. They didn't know if they were heels or babyfaces. After all, Allen had a belly that stuck out as if he was pregnant, no chest, buggy whip arms, and the Paul E. hairstyle (completely bald on top and long in the back). I don't knock Paul E. for that. He had the advantage of always being able to wear a cap, creating the illusion that he wasn't bald. My point is, that as a wrestler, Allen couldn't wear a cap, so he looked like a bald guy with long hair growing from the back of his head. His partner was a "50-ish" looking guy with only half of his teeth visible to the people standing next to him. They weren't exactly the Hardy Boys. Maybe the Bowery Boys. However, when Mike and Allen started slapping high fives and

shaking hands with the people, the crowd began to clap and cheer.

Brad Armstrong was a tremendous worker who had a muscular physique. Tim Horner, while not exactly George Clooney in the looks department, was a very capable worker and a good hand. Mike and Allen weren't exactly who the fans would choose to replace them, and they weren't going to support them as wholeheartedly as they did Tim and Brad. As far as Iceman's replacement as top heel, Mike really scraped the bottom of the barrel by making what he thought was a good political move. He had Jim Carpenter put on wrestling tights and a hood, and billed him as the "Louisiana Assassin." Jim was like Bruce Prichard: a frustrated talent who just didn't have the ability to act in that capacity. He had been "trained" by Ben Norwood (if that tells you anything), but unlike my Jersey friends, Jim wasn't at all inquisitive or anxious to learn. Quiet the opposite, in fact. He thought he knew everything, and considered it everyone's privilege that he was "returning" to the

ring. To be perfectly frank, the only time he had ever been in the ring was there in the IWF, and the only reason he was allowed in the ring then was because he bought into the company. Jim was out for the glory, and as much as I hate to say it, by bending to Jim's desires, my friend Mike was a willing contributor to the beginning of the IWF's demise.

To their credit, even though Mike and Allen didn't exactly look the part, they could get the job done in the ring. Every night, they had exciting matches with Bob Owens and Bronx Bull, which the people really got into. Unfortunately, that match was always followed by the main event, which featured the "Louisiana Assassin" (who also decided to become the IWF champion) against whomever he and Mike decided to put him with. Jim did have one redeeming quality. If nothing else, he was consistent. His matches consistently sucked. He was worse than terrible. Please understand me when I say that I am not even slightly exaggerating when I make this

next statement. Jim would have had to improve dramatically just to be considered the sh–s. Compared to Jim Carpenter, Nikolai Volkoff was Bret Hart. He was a 6-foot-4, 330-pound, round-shouldered, pot-bellied, ham-handed, bony-legged slouch, who had the grace and coordination of a three-legged elephant, and the athletic ability of Raymond Burr. His long, black tights were too baggy, his cape was too long, and his mask was ill-fitting. Oh, yes. And he was the champ.

Iceman left the belt with the office when he left the IWF. I'm surprised that he didn't just take it with him, like a lot of guys have done in a lot of organizations over the years, but to his credit, he didn't. I'm usually the chief advocate of doing what the office says, but if I were the Icemen, I wouldn't have laid down for Jim Carpenter, either. You've got to lay down the line somewhere, and that was the time. Iceman was a real pro. "Ice" had been on top, or near the top, in Dallas, San Antonio, Memphis, and Bill Watts' Mid-South organization, and he deserved better

treatment than that. With Sika in the IWF, as well, and Rodney (the future Yokozuma) starting there the following week, having Jim Carpenter in the main event was like a slap in the face.

I was Sika's manager when he came in, which I really enjoyed, for several reasons. First, Sika was a great guy whose company I enjoyed, and secondly, because he was a true veteran that I knew I could learn a lot from. Even now, in 2002, with 29 years experience in the business, I am still learning, and I will always continue to absorb as much knowledge as I can. Once you think you know it all, you might as well retire.

Sika, along with his brother Afa, was one-half of the Wild Samoans tag team in the WWF. He runs a fantastic wrestling school in eastern Pennsylvania and has trained outstanding stars such as Chris Kanyon, Billy Kidman, Rikishi, and Virgil. Well, okay. We won't hold Virgil against him, but Afa is a great teacher who runs a great training academy. Sika and I traveled together, roomed

together, and drank "a lot" together. It was vodka for Sika and beer for me. We would go to the arena, do our business, travel to the next town, drink until bedtime, get up, eat breakfast, and start all over again. We just had a great time together.

Sika was a great guy, but he could be deadly if you crossed him. One night at a small town spot show, a fellow named Nathan Dixon found out just how deadly the mighty Sika could be. Even I was scared, and I was Sika's friend. Before his matches, Sika would go through the motions of a Samoan ritual, which I would pretend to understand. It appeared to be religious in nature, with Sika making a gesture like the sign of the cross. I stood respectfully in the corner and allowed him the dignity of his ritual, rather than jumping around in my usual heel manager way. Nathan Dixon, a skinny, green, knockoff boy, was there only to get squashed. For some reason, he thought it would be funny to make fun of Sika's ceremony and mimic him. To say the least, that was not a good idea. Sika's eyes lit up, as if on

fire, as he shot across the ring like a bolt of lightning. I had no idea my huge friend could move that fast, but trust me, he struck like a cobra. He chopped that young punk in the throat so hard and so fast that I thought he would decapitate him. Sika proceeded to choke the life out of the kid while slamming his head onto the mat. "Now you see death," Sika hissed coldly through clenched teeth. I truly believed he was going to tear out Dixon's throat, or gouge his eyes, or both, since his other hand was digging into the idiot's eye socket. In the nick of time, Lou Fabiano, a graduate of Afa's school and a good friend of Sika's, came to the ring and helped me convince Sika to release him. He did, although it was with a lot of reluctance As the terrified punk came to his senses, I told him, "If I was you, I'd get the fu– out of here." He ran out of the ring, grabbed his belongings from the dressing room, and followed my advice. Lesson number one in the wrestling business: Don't mess with the Samoans.

Business in the IWF went from bad to

worse. Edward Faulk decided that paying the highly rated local TV stations for decent time slots was a waste of money. He switched the television show to a couple of low-powered, low-rated, local stations and made deals to operate on the barter system. The station would be allowed to sell the commercial time in return for airing the IWF program. They chose to air the program at one o'clock on Monday mornings. Now we had a shifty champion, not exactly "teen idol" tag team champs, and a bad time slot. To add to that depressing turn of events, I received the news that Robert Fuller and his entourage had changed their plans. Instead of going to Dallas, they made a deal with Jerry Jarrett and went to Memphis.

I was in shock. I had quit Alabama, turned down Memphis, (which is where I really wanted to be), made plans to go to Dallas with Robert, got screwed around by Robert, ended up in Louisiana in a dead-end situation, and now Robert was in Memphis! I didn't know if I felt more betrayed than angry, or more angry than betrayed. Robert

was living it up in Memphis, the place where I wanted to be, while I was pissing up a rope in Louisiana.

When the office laid out their plans to kill Houma, Louisiana (our best town), I knew it was time to go. The IWF was a prime example of how the combination of big egos and small talent can ruin something that had the potential to be very good. The "honor" of killing Houma goes to Edward Faulk, co-owner of the IWF. Ed was a big, fat, horse-toothed, Cajun guy who never wrestled a day in his life. Granted, he had been a referee in both Bill Watts' territory and the CWF, so he knew enough about the business (or should have known enough, anyway) to know that what he was about to do was business suicide. He was jealous, evidently, that his business partner, Jim Carpenter, was the IWA champion, and Edward decided that he wanted to be the champion. He didn't think about the fact that he wasn't a wrestler, that he had the physique of Jabba the Hut, and that a move like that would not be good for

business. Old Eddie put on a mask and full body tights, called himself the "Cajun Assassin," and, against everyone's better judgment, booked himself into the main event in Houma in a title match against the "Louisiana Assassin." The only thing they did correctly was to live up to their "Assassin" monikers. They both worked diligently to "assassinate" Houma, Louisiana, and ultimately, the IWF.

Thankfully, I wasn't around after their "title" match to witness the final nail being driven into the coffin of the company. The match was too awful for an accurate description, but in respect to those of you who have taken the time to read my thoughts and words up to this point, I will make my best effort. Two blundering, out of shape, masked, no-work wannabes, bounced off each other like two blind people trapped in a telephone booth. After 15 unbearable minutes of fake-looking punches, missed kicks, and general screwed-up-edness (if that's even a word), the Cajun Assassin hit the ropes, stopped in mid-ring, jumped in the air, and

planted his feet onto the stomach of the fallen Louisiana Assassin. It was his feeble version of a "big splash," performed in a way that kept him from having to leave his feet. The best thing about that finish was that it put a merciful end to a match that had gone on for about 15 minutes too long. In all of my time in the business, I had never witnessed such a bad match.

Sika looked at me and said, "Brother, there's no hope here."

And he was right. Fortunately for me, Sika knew a guy who was going to run three weekly shows in Florida's panhandle for three months. He told me he would get me booked if I wanted to go. When he added that the pay was $100 a night, my answer, of course, was a resounding, "Yes!" I told Mike Davis that I had to go, right away. I wasn't going to give my notice. I was going to leave. I had too much pride and respect for the business to stay in that type of a situation. That was the first and only time that I left a territory without notice. In my

opinion, $100 a night for 90 days was just what I needed while I got myself situated in another territory. Mike was more than cool with me leaving on such short notice. In fact, Mike admitted to me that he would have left himself, but there really wasn't any other place for him to go.

One week later, I met Sika in Pensacola and he introduced me to the promoter. The Pensacola operation was much better than the IWF.

Chapter 12
The Flophouse

Two weeks into my Florida run, irony reared its ugly head when I got a call from David Woods, the owner of the CWF in Alabama. Eddie Gilbert had left the CWF for World Championship Wrestling [WCW] in Atlanta, Georgia, and had taken Sid and Paul E. with him. Woods had hired a new booker — Robert Fuller! Robert and his happy crew had left Memphis and were back in Alabama, and Robert wanted Bruno back. Well, I had my pride to think about … but pride always goes before the fall, and I needed a full-time spot more than 90 days in Florida, so with Sika's blessing, I told Woods that I would be there in a couple of days. I was scheduled to start back in Birmingham's Fair Park Arena on a Monday night.

My last shot in Florida was at a night club in Pensacola. The card was loaded with talent: me,

Sika and Afa, Samu, Rodney Anoai (pre-Yokozuna), Lord Humungous (a trainee of Sika's, not Sid), Manny Fernandez, Junkyard Dog, Gary Albright, and a lot of young guys that Afa trained. The card, the house, and the payoff, were all good. Afa sent me off with a $300 payday, and just before I left, he handed me another C-note, and wouldn't take no for an answer. Thank you Uncle Afa and Uncle Sika. God bless both of you. I fueled up my Lincoln, which I still kept in immaculate condition, and headed for Birmingham, Alabama. I had a good savings account at that time, and I wanted it to continue growing. I always made decent money in the CWF, so I predicted that it would be good for me once again. Sadly, I was wrong.

Evidently, Eddie Gilbert had done very well in Alabama. He put together one heck of a crew: himself, Danny Davis, Tom Prichard, Shane Douglas, Sid, Ken Wayne, Randy Colley, Doug Gilbert (Eddie's brother), Pez Whatley, Jerry Stubbs, Dirty White Boy, and a few

others. However, when Eddie left, much of the crew did, too.

Robert was desperate for talent, and was willing to take just about anybody he could find. At that point, his crew consisted of himself, his wife, Jimmy Golden, and me. Period. He had until that Monday night to book a whole crew. To his credit, he pulled it off. The team wasn't wrestling's answer to the Dallas Cowboys, though. It was more like Burt Reynolds' football team from the movie, "The Longest Yard." Robert brought in Adrian Street, a tough old Welshman with one heck of a gay gimmick; Miss Linda, as Adrian's valet (Adrian's real-life wife), Brian Lee, a tall, blonde guy with a cocky attitude, who never fully realized his potential in the business; Burrhead Jones, a 60-year-old veteran who was still over in Alabama in his own way; Terry Simms, a stodgy, pudgy bastard, who nobody liked, but was a very good heel; and Dennis Condrey, a legendary figure in the business and a great heel. Two others names that really hit home

with me were my friend and booker from Louisiana Mike Davis, and Cactus Jack, a newcomer from Long Island, New York.

It was a real surprise to see Mike Davis, since the last time I saw him, he was the babysitter at a failing asylum in Louisiana. I really could have ridden him hard, but I guess not setting the IWF on fire as a booker, and having to look for a starting date elsewhere, was punishment enough, so I just hugged him and asked him for the details about him leaving. Believe it or not, it was due to the WWF. Apparently, the WWF taped their television show in Baton Rouge one night, and they needed job boys, so Mike and his fellow "RPM," Alan Martin, volunteered to do squash jobs. This infuriated Edward Faulk, who fired them both on the spot a few days later when they came back to work in the IWF. Evidently, Faulk didn't think it was a good idea for his tag team champions to get squashed by Demolition on the highest-profile wrestling TV show in the world. As much as I hate to admit it, I have to agree with Edward on

that point. Don't get me wrong. I love the WWF (WWE), and always will, but love or no love, if you don't work for the WWE full-time, it's not a good idea to get squashed on world-wide television. It's not good business to sacrifice what you're doing for a living for one payday. If there was any hope left in the IWF, Mike ended it with that move, and there was no turning back. Alan had nowhere to go and was out of the business, and Mike was now working opening matches in Alabama. And, not so coincidentally, the IWF shut its doors. What a business!

In the CWF, Dennis Condrey was working on top with Wendell Cooley for the CWF belt, while Robert, to his credit, was keeping himself down on the card, with no particular angle. Robert had me managing the tag team of Brian Lee and Jimmy Golden, while Sylvia was managing Robert. Brian and Jimmy were working a program with Tracy Smothers and Steve Armstrong for the CWF tag belts, and they were having tremendous matches. The other "change" in my managerial

stable was none other than Cactus Jack. Wow! The great Cactus Jack. What a thrill. (not really)

The entire scenario, from business arrangements to living arrangements, wasn't very good. None of it. I liked Mick [Cactus Jack] and he liked me. To this day, I like Mick, and I hope he feels the same way about me. However, a great worker he wasn't. Sorry, folks. I just call 'em like I see 'em. Here's how the Mick Foley/Bruno Lauer "relationship" began.

David Woods called a meeting with everybody in his crew. He told us, among other things, that he had an apartment in Montgomery for each member of the crew who was interested, where they could live rent-free. Everybody thought that was the greatest thing since twist-off beer caps. Evidently, David, who owned a TV station in Montgomery, struck a deal with the manager of an apartment complex for a free apartment in exchange for advertisements on his TV station. When he

explained the situation, he explained it as if we would each have our own apartment. Wrong! He had one two-bedroom apartment for eight of us. That was a new low for me. I didn't see anything good coming of it, so I did what I always did when times got tough. I called Lawler to see if they needed a manager in Memphis. He didn't answer his phone. I really wanted to go home, so I called Jerry Jarrett. He told me to call Lawler. I left a message on Lawler's answering machine. He wouldn't return my call.

For the time being, I was stuck in Alabama. Of course, the apartment was free, and since we were used to living in Spartan conditions, we all squeezed into our new home away from home — Mick, Jerry Stubbs, Terry Simms, Big O, Mike Peden, Wayne Tatum, Mike Davis, and little, old me. Everything about the arrangement sucked. As I said, we didn't have to pay rent. The only thing we were responsible for was the electric bill and the phone bill, and between the eight of us, we somehow managed to screw that up. Jerry Stubbs

was a real whore-chaser. I think he knew a whore in every city in the CWF, and I believe he called each of them every night and had a detailed conversation with them, because the phone bill was through the roof. Our first bill was $600, and 98 percent of the calls were made by Stubbs. Naturally, the phone bill was never paid. Stubbs left his wife and ran off with some douche bag he had met in east Tennessee, so three weeks after the bill arrived in our mailbox, our phone was disconnected.

We were responsible for the phone bill and electric bill, and not the rent, but between the 8 of us, we fucked that all up. What a bunch of fucking idiots we were. We fucked up a free fucking ride. Jerry Stubbs was a real whore-chaser, and I think he knew a different whore in every city in the CWF area, and I believe he called each of them every night and had a detailed conversation with each and everyone of them, because, the phone bill was through the fucking roof.

The next thing on the problem agenda was the issue of cleanliness, a subject which everybody completely ignored. Personal hygiene has always been a high priority on my task of things I do each day. I take three showers or baths a day, shave twice a day, etc. In those days, however, I wasn't on top of my game. I wasn't dirty, but serious alcohol consumption (a nightly ritual) made me lazy. Each of the towns were just a short distance from Montgomery, so we were home early every night and had plenty of time to drink. There was an after-hours bar nearby called "The Gambler." The Big O and I, and occasionally Robert Fuller and Mick, would go there to play pool, throw darts, and drink beer. We actually started referring to ourselves as the "Sun-Up Cruisers," because often, it would be six o'clock in the morning before we realized what time it was. We would then go back to the apartment and sleep until the crack of noon, at which time we would eat "breakfast" at Wendy's, then sit by the pool until it was time to eat again. A couple of hours before show time, we left for the town. After the show, we returned to

Montgomery, went back to The Gambler, and got drunk. The cycle then started over and repeated itself every day.

That "rigorous" routine didn't leave much room for mundane tasks like washing dirty laundry. As Mick Foley so eloquently described in his book, I had a "magic" clothes pile, onto which I'd throw my dirty clothes. After a few weeks went by and my clothes drawer had been emptied of clothes, I would pull something that looked "clean" from the bottom of the pile and put it on. What a life.

After one week of living a filthy, unclean lifestyle, I changed my attitude completely. Terry Simms was always generous and thoughtful of everyone, and he was always willing to share what he had with those who were less fortunate than he was. One day, Terry brought each of us a dose of the crabs. Considerate to a thought, he made sure that he brought enough for everyone. Terry was another Jerry Stubbs, and more often than not, he would come back to the apartment and brag about

whatever slut he managed to "score" that night, as if we really cared.

Well, we all cared that day. Big O was the one who caught the stodgy, little bastard in mid-RID and immediately alerted us to the problem. Big O had walked in while Terry was in the bathroom, shaving his balls and rubbing RID on his beanbag, and trying to keep us from finding out about it. Discretion wasn't big on our list of priorities in that flophouse. We all shared the same toilet, couch, love seat, chair, towels, and so forth. And being a bunch of slobs, we lounged around in our underwear, which was like an open invitation to the crabs. Sure enough, we all came down with the cooties. That night in the dressing room, there were eight guys in the shower who all looked prepubescent. Our completely hairless private areas were highlighted with a tinge of deep red that came from the scrubbing and harsh chemicals. Needless to say, we hated Terry Simms.

I had to get out of there. The towns weren't drawing, the minimum payoff was $40, and that was all we could ever expect to get. I was living like white trash. I missed Memphis more than ever, but I assumed that Lawler was still mad at me, so I didn't have any hopes of getting help in that direction.

One day, after a particularly bad week, Robert Fuller told us that if the towns didn't pick up within a month, David Woods was going to close the promotion. I didn't need a Ph.D to figure out that the towns weren't going to pick up, so I got busy trying to plan out my next move. When Mick Foley told us that he already had an option, we all thought he was blowing smoke. He said he was going to drive to Atlanta and show up, unannounced, at the WCW TV taping, to see if he might get a tryout, and possibly, a job. I have to give him credit for having big balls, because I never would have had the guts to show up where I wasn't booked. That kind of thing was frowned upon, and it still is today. Nobody wants to see a

guy hanging around all day looking for a job. It's annoying. If the office didn't expect me, I wasn't going to show up and hang around the hallways like a mark, hoping to get a few words with the booker. However, wrestling was Mick's life, and what he wanted to do was his business, so I wished him luck.

While I sat and pondered my next move, fate intervened for both Mick and me. I can't go into details about how it happened because I wasn't there, but Mick got a job with WCW. Mick tells the story in great detail in his book, "Have a Nice Day." I highly recommend it. It really is a fantastic book. You may recall that in earlier pages, I knocked Mick for his cheapness and his utter lack of ability. I meant what I said, but don't get me wrong. That doesn't mean I don't like or respect him. Quite the opposite, actually. It's actually to his credit that he had no look, no body, and no real athletic ability, and in spite of all that, he still managed to make millions of dollars. He also paid his dues in full, which is a big plus in my

book.

But, Mick! For Pete's sake. Treat yourself once in awhile. Go buy yourself some new clothes. You've earned it.

I didn't change my fortunes by going out on a limb like Mick did, but one day, my old acquaintance, Jack Curtis, contacted me. Interestingly enough, he was in Louisiana with Ed Faulk, and they were going to reopen the ICW territory with a two-week tour of Oklahoma, which they would follow by opening all over Louisiana. It was music to my ear when Jack told me they wanted to bring me in. I trusted Jack as a businessman who had good knowledge of our business, so we talked money ($100 for the first night in Oklahoma, then an $80 minimum each night thereafter). It wasn't until after he assured me that neither Ed nor Jim Carpenter would, under any circumstances, be wrestling, that I agreed to go in. I knew Jack had more sense than to allow that to happen, but I just had to ask.

The next night, I gave Robert Fuller my notice, which he accepted graciously. He went on to tell me that Jerry Jarrett had just bought the Dallas territory from Fritz von Erich. After telling me that Jimmy and Sylvia were going there with him, he had the extreme audacity to ask if I'd like to go, too! Burn me once, shame on you, burn me twice, shame on me. The last Dallas episode was still fresh in my mind, so thanks, but no thanks. Not again. I was going back to Oklahoma, the home of the Sooners, Jim Ross, and Native Americans of all descriptions. I thanked Robert for the help he had been to me over the years and we went out to quaff a few beers.

I had about five more shots to make in the CWF before I was to leave, but when I got back to the apartment and found out that the electricity had been cut off, I told Robert that if he didn't mind, I would like to just go ahead and leave. I thought I might visit some friends in Mississippi and Memphis on my way to meeting Jack Curtis and Ed Faulk. Robert was kind enough to give me his

blessing and wished me well.

I hate to always sound like a sourpuss, but here I go again. I have newspaper articles to back me up, so I don't feel bad about being negative. Oklahoma was … well, as Terry Taylor would say, same sh–, different pile. The name of the local promoter in Oklahoma was Andy Mikus. Mikus had promoted truck pulls and rock concerts, but he didn't know anything about the wrestling business. Jack Curtis tried to help him, but the guy thought he already knew everything there was to know. Mikus had taken advance money from the office, supposedly to buy publicity, but the only publicity we saw was a sign in front of the building in Muskogee. He was also supposed to have set up several advance sales locations, but that didn't happen, either. We had a good crew: Iceman Parsons, Mike Davis, Reggie B Fine, Brad Armstrong, Candi Devine, Fifi, Junkyard Dog (our headliner), and me. That's a show worth seeing, but nobody knew we were in town! In my opinion, if the shows had been publicized properly (or at

all), they definitely would have drawn, but Andy Mikus made them his little secret.

We ran three towns: Muskogee, Enid, and Tallequah, and we didn't draw 100 people combined for all three shows. When none of the crew had been paid anything after the third show, Ed and Jack put their foot down, demanding that Mikus pay us for the three shows that had taken place.

While that confrontation was taking place, we were all being unceremoniously booted out of our motel rooms at the Tallequah Inn by the owner and several members of the local police department. Mikus had promised to pay for our lodging, but guess what? He didn't pay the bill, and every one of us got the boot. By order of the police, we weren't permitted to leave the premises until the matter of the lodging fee was straightened out. At 7:45 in the morning, like a group of captured felons, we were all herded into a large meeting room at the motel, which, by the way, was

ironically called "The Happy Room." We were all practically broke, hungry, sleepy, and upset. We sat and napped on the floor until ten o'clock, when the owner took pity on us and sent in cereal, milk, orange juice, and donuts. We dove into the offering like starving people (which we practically were) and ate like gluttons.

When the sheriff arrived, he gathered us together to summarize the situation. He was a really nice guy named Andy Sellers, and he treated us well. First, he let us know that we weren't under arrest and we weren't in trouble. As owners of the ICW, Jim Carpenter and Ed Faulk had accepted liability for payment of the rooms. (Jack Curtis was just the CEO, and not an owner. Later, after a meeting with Mikus, we learned that he had already returned home to Louisiana.) We were no longer required to stay on the premises, although we were grateful that we had been allowed to remain in the Happy Room until the matter of our money was straightened out. Knowing we would soon get paid, Reggie, Iceman, and I walked up the

street and ate at a nice restaurant. Wrong again. When we met with Mikus, he claimed he was broke, and he couldn't pay us until he mortgaged his house. When we complained, he said he didn't think we were as broke as we were letting on, since he saw one of the crew buying a 12-pack of beer the night before. Seven heads turned in unison to look at me. I just looked down at my shoes in embarrassment. Of course, it was me, but so what? It was my money, and beer wasn't illegal, so get over it.

In the end, a local church actually gave us 50 percent of our promised payoff so we could leave and go to wherever each of us wanted to go. Mikus not only promised to pay back the church, but he assured us that he would send us the remaining $150 he owed each of us. I hope the church had better luck than I did, although to be fair, that was only 20 years ago, and I expect to be receiving a check from Mikus any day now.

I had more than three weeks before the bookings

were to begin in Louisiana, and I wasn't exactly champing at the bit with excitement. I had lost all hope of ever returning home again, but out of desperation, I decided to call Lawler one more time. Miracle of miracles, Lawler answered the phone. Even more surprising, he gave me a starting date. I was finally going home! When I called Jack Curtis and gave him the news, he expressed happiness for me and wished me the best. I could barely contain my excitement as I drove towards Memphis, Channel 5, the Mid-South Coliseum, and the site of my initial success. They say you can't go home again, but they're wrong! You can, and I did. With every mile that passed, I swore that I would never, ever leave again.

Chapter 13
Doing Hard Time

Before returning to Memphis (which was now called the USWA), I had a booking commitment to make for Ben Masters in Cordele, Georgia. I managed Ray Candy that night. Ray was a big, black man, who must have weighed close to 400 pounds, but he was very agile and a light worker. He was one heck of a guy and everybody liked him. I mention this for no particular reason, other than I wanted to say how privileged I was to have managed him for that one night. He died not too long afterwards.

After making that Friday night shot, I drove all night long and arrived back in Memphis on Saturday morning at 4:30. It was so late (or early), and I was so sleepy and tired, that I pulled into the Channel 5 parking lot and fell fast sleep. What irony. What goes around, comes around. I had

been all over the country, been in several territories, had saved quite a bit of money, and when I was finally given the opportunity to return home, I was sleeping in the same parking lot I had slept in many years before.

Around 8:30, I woke up and stumbled into the WMC-TV 5 television studio. I took a shower, shaved, got dressed, and prepared myself for a reunion with Lawler and the Memphis crew. I had waited for this day for a long time, and I was excited beyond belief to be back. Lawler walked in around 9:30. After we hugged and exchanged small talk, he told me to come to his office in about 15 minutes, where he would give me my new assignment in the USWA. I went back to the dressing area, got reacquainted with old friends, and met new ones. It had been five-and-a-half years since I had been in that dressing room, but it was as if I had never left. I was so happy to see the regulars: Eddie Marlin, Jeff Jarrett, Dave Brown, and Lance Russell. I was so glad to be there that I even felt happy to see Bill Dundee, who

had begun to treat me with a great deal of respect before I previously left the territory. It was at that point that I actually began to like Bill. I was even happier when I was told who I would be managing — Big Phil Hickerson, a great guy from Jackson, Tennessee who was a semi-legend in the Memphis territory. Phil was a "managee," a traveling partner, and a drinking buddy, all combined into one big, stout, tough bastard.

Lawler gave us a great gimmick that started out well and got hot really quick. Phil and I were now "father and son." I was Bruno Hickerson and he was Daddy Phil, and we were two no-good, cheating mothers. The gimmick might not sound like much today, but in 1988, it got over big. We walked to the ring smoking Kool cigarettes. After grinding them out under our feet, we would get into the ring and do a set of make-believe calisthenics. Before I left the ring, Phil would pick me up and hug me. To the fans, big, fat Phil hugging little, dried-up Bruno was quite a sight. The people hated us, and we loved every

minute of it.

Phil's main gimmick was to carry a chain in his tights. We would pass it back and forth as we screwed with the babyface, the referee, and most importantly, the people who bought tickets. Phil would only use the chain one time in a match, and that was to start the heat. When the time was right, Phil would signal me to draw the referee, and then — BAM! He would cold-cock the babyface. For the next six to eight minutes, the match was ours. I say "ours" because I was involved almost as much as Phil. I was in my glory! During the heat, Phil and I worked together like a well-oiled machine. I would draw the referee so Phil could cheat. He would draw the ref so I could choke, punch, and kick the babyface. When the babyface covered Phil for a pinfall that might have gone as high as ten, I drew the ref until Phil had recovered sufficiently to free himself. Phil would draw the ref so I could trip the babyface as he ran by my station at the corner of the ring.

Our standard finish was to have Phil stop the babyface with an eye gouge when they were in the midst of a hot comeback. Phil would then pull out his chain, but just before he could use it, the babyface would intercept it. While Phil and the babyface engaged in a tug of war with the chain, the referee would see it and take it away. As the referee was handing the chain to the timekeeper, I would jump up onto the ring apron, tap the babyface on the shoulder, and whack him across the head with my cowboy boot, which I immediately replaced on my foot. We built up a lot of controversy over my "allegedly" loaded boots. Phil won the USWA title from Jimmy Valiant with that little routine. It didn't matter if Phil was wrestling a main event guy, a jabroni, an up-and-comer, or a washed-up old geezer. We beat everybody with that finish. A partial list of victims includes Jeff Jarrett, Jerry Lawler, Bill Dundee, Billy Travis, Jimmy Valiant, Max Payne, Brickhouse Brown, Dutch Mantell, and even Crusher Blackwell, God rest his soul.

The success of our gimmick could be seen in the houses and the payoffs. The guarantee had been reduced to $40 a night, but while Daddy Phil and I were together, I never made less than $100 a shot.

Phil and I were building up to a main event match against Lawler, which was where the real money lay. One night in Nashville, my veteran status and my slowly building meanness (from all the crap I had been subjected to) reared its ugly head when I defended the business and our gimmick in one mean, violent act. Similar to my episode with Ass-Face from years before, I took out my frustration on a job guy, and like Ass-Face, this guy deserved what he got. He was booked in a dark match with Daddy Phil in Nashville. Since the match was dark [not televised], Phil sold for the kid, and even took a few bumps for him. Phil didn't utilize the chain, but we did have the boot finish figured in for the outcome. The guy was too green to realize that it was a privilege for the champ to get the win by letting his manager whack a job guy with his boot, rather than battering him

around the ring and making him look worthless.

To sum it up, when the guy was making his comeback (which he really didn't deserve to begin with), we did a different variation of our usual routine. Phil simply drew the ref, while I jumped up, tapped the babyface on the shoulder, and whacked him with my boot. That guy must have been tougher than Lawler, Dundee, Jeff Jarrett, and all of the other top guys, because not only did he fail to sell the boot, but he walked towards me, acting like he was going to attack me. I couldn't believe it! If I couldn't knock out "Nature's Best" (the guy's stupid name), how could I knock out a tough SOB like Jerry Lawler? I thought, "Screw this guy," and clouted the no-dues-paying moron right across his ear with the heel of my boot. It wasn't a working hit, either. I hit him as hard as I could. Blood flew up and out, and it looked like somebody had smashed a balloon full of ketchup against the side of his head. Boy, did I ever get a bunch of grief about that later on from Randy Hales, but I didn't care. To this day, I believe I

did the right thing, and I would do it again. I told Randy that I was protecting our business, and I knew that Lawler, who had taken the "knockout" from my boot, would have approved.

Phil and I worked a program with Jeff (the future "Double J"), and then Lawler, and the boot was a big part of it. Phil actually kept the belt through the matches with Jeff, and even Lawler (!), but the time finally came when we had to drop the belt, and Phil's successor was to be none other than muscular newcomer, Scott Steiner. I liked Scott, and he was always nice to me, so I didn't mind him being the first guy to circumvent the boot gimmick. During the match, we introduced the chain, then he let me choke, punch, and kick him, selling everything like I was Muhammad Ali. However, when the time came for me to whack him with the boot, he blocked the shot, took it away from me, and used it to knock me off the ring apron. He then kayoed Daddy Phil with it and pinned him. 1-2-3. What a pop that finish got!

Scott was the first (and only) guy to beat Phil (and me) at his (our) own game, and it worked. Attention: Randy Hales. That was the way business should be done, not by apologizing to "Nature's Best," as you wanted me to. We were there to draw money, not cater to green-as-a-gourd idiots who didn't have any business in the ring.

Even after dropping the strap, we continued to do well and the payoffs were great. Jeff Jarrett and Billy Travis were still tag teaming, and at this point, they were featured in the semi-main events against Tommy and Doug Gilbert. Lawler was spending a lot of time in Minnesota as Verne Gagne's A.W.A. champion, so Phil versus Steiner was the main event. Scott Steiner and Phil worked well together, and Scott was always cool with me. I've heard a lot of talk in recent years that when Scott went to WCW and became Big Poppa Pump, he really went off the deep end and acted like a jerk to a lot of people. I don't know if that's true or not. All I can say is that he never talked down to me or treated me with any disrespect, so I

have nothing bad to say about him.

I can testify to the fact that Scott did have a temper, but he had the ability to back it up. A case in point was an incident that occurred one night at a spot show in Murfreesboro, Tennessee, which was under Eddie Marlin's supervision. Eddie was a great guy, but he didn't like to spend any more money than was absolutely necessary, so the cards in his towns were very basic: eight wrestlers, one referee, and one manager. Eddie would book four singles matches, then have four of the guys come back in a tag team match. He capped off the shows with a battle royal, which meant everybody worked twice, and the guys in the tag match had to work three times. No matter how many times you wrestled, you got the standard payoff. The only exception to that was if you took the place of somebody who didn't show up, or, for whatever reason, wasn't able to wrestle.

That night in Murfreesboro, one of the singles matches was Scott Steiner against "Gorgeous"

Gary Young. Gary was a capable heel who looked good. However, he was also a nuisance, a know-it-all, and a constant ribber. He didn't play good ribs, either, and they eventually started to wear thin on a lot of people, including me. He would put BENGAY in people's underwear while they were in the shower, just to watch them suffer the burning aftereffects on their privates. He padlocked pants to chairs, or to a wall, and he would laugh when you had to cut your belt loop to get them loose. One day, I was sleeping in my underwear on a wooden rocking chair at Tommy Lane's apartment in Nashville. Young handcuffed me to the chair and left with the key! I had to call the police and have them come out to unlock the cuffs. Tommy Lane took pictures of the whole affair. I still have them to this day, and I still get pissed off when I stumble across them.

Well, Gary picked the wrong guy to mess with when he decided to mess with Scott Steiner. While Gary and Scott were having a one-on-one match, a spot got messed up. After the

match, Gary told referee Frank Morrell to tell Scott to learn how to work, or something to that effect. Frank came back to the heel dressing room a few minutes later and told Gary that Scott told him, "Tell Young that he'd better learn how to shoot!"

In the tag team match that followed later that night, Gary Young and Don Bass were pitted against Scott Steiner and Brickhouse Brown. Scott showed everybody present, especially Gary Young, what he meant by his statement. Scott started the match against Donny, but immediately told Donny to tag in Gary. Assuming that Scott must have a spot he wanted to do with Gary, Donny reached back and tagged him. As soon as Gary was in the ring, Scotty was on him like a boa constrictor. He tied up that poor guy like a pretzel. Gary kept tapping out, reaching for the ropes, and giving up. He quickly discovered that stuff like that doesn't work in a real fight. Scotty finally hooked Gary in a chicken-wing cross-face and put on the pressure. Gary's face turned bright

red, then beet red, then purple, and finally, as white as a sheet. I honestly believe that when Scotty released him, Gary was seconds away from death. When Scotty let go, Gary flopped to the mat like a fish pulled out of the water. Needless to say, that was the last time Gary messed with Scott Steiner, or anybody who Scotty liked. That was perfectly fine with me. Scotty liked me.

When his program with Scotty ended, Phil decided that he was tired of life on the road, even though the schedule with the USWA allowed us to be home four nights a week or more. Phil went home to Jackson, Tennessee, where he started selling cars. As far as I know, that was his last run in the business.

The next guy Lawler put me together with was Jeff Gaylord, "The Missouri Tiger." Gaylord, a former college and pro football player, was big, rugged, and muscular. While he wasn't Shawn Michaels by any stretch of the imagination, he was a decent worker. The problem was, he was a real

oddball and a habitual kleptomaniac. That was a very hard combination to get used to. Gaylord would take anything that wasn't nailed down, even things he didn't want or need. We would go into a store for a drink or a snack, and he would get back into the car and pull sunglasses, Band-Aids, Tootsie Rolls, lighters, and all kinds of non-essential items out of his pockets, and throw them onto the dashboard or the seat. I decided at that point that it was in my best interest to quit traveling with him.

One night, the USWA ran a show at the Memphis Motorsports Park, a racing facility in, oddly enough, Memphis. It was a good show with a packed house of both wrestling and racing fans. They alternated matches and races all through the night, with the grand finale being Jerry "The King" Lawler racing against Bill "Superstar" Dundee in hot rods. That was a lot of fun. Mr. Guy Coffey was the USWA's "gimmick man." He sold all the souvenirs: pictures, hats, key chains, T-shirts, etc. That night, he had a great night as he

sold practically everything he brought. He kept the money in a big, grey, strongbox.

At intermission, as per USWA tradition, the babyfaces would all sit behind Mr. Coffey's table and sign the pictures the fans had bought. Lawler, Dundee, Gaylord, Jeff Jarrett, and Brickhouse Brown all came out to do their autograph session. When the bell rang to signal that the show was about to resume, they all returned to the dressing rooms. All but Gaylord. He was missing in action, as was Mr. C's strongbox! Reputation had preceded Gaylord, and it didn't take a Sherlock Holmes to put two and two together.

The show was held on a Friday night, and we all had to be at the WMC studio no later than nine o'clock on the following morning. Gaylord, whose other oddity was that he would be late for his own funeral, let alone work, was the last to wander into the dressing room. He was seemingly unfazed by the fact that everyone stopped whatever activity they were involved with and looked at him as if he

had just ridden in on the back of a giraffe. Lawler called Gaylord into his makeshift office there at the TV studio and they had a short conversation. I don't know what was said in that conference, but Gaylord left the studio, returned about 25 minutes later with something like $2,900 in cash, and handed it to Mr. Coffey. It was the exact amount that had been missing. Gaylord claimed he didn't steal the money, but he had decided to pay Mr. C, anyway, just to "save" his reputation. And, just like O.J. Simpson, he would get to the bottom of the situation and get his money from the "real thief." We all thought that was quite amusing since we doubted Gaylord had seen $2,900 in one lump sum since his football days. Somehow, though, he had $2,900 to spare, just "to save his reputation." Of course, that was pretty much the end for Gaylord, who left the territory and went to Texas.

About that same time, Lawler told us that a new booker would be starting in two weeks … Eddie Gilbert. After my experience in Alabama, I didn't

exactly welcome the news. In fact, I was devastated because I figured I'd be history once "Hot Stuff" got there. All of those years it took for me to get back to Memphis were wasted, I thought. When Eddie came to WMC-TV 5 on his appointed starting date, one of the first things he did was call me aside into a private room. I thought, "Hell, this is it. I'm getting my notice already." I was very pleasantly surprised to find that I had been worried for absolutely no reason. I was so happy to hear what Eddie said to me that morning. Basically, he told me that he hadn't authorized or approved of the way Missy Hyatt had talked to me in Alabama, and he hoped that I could forget the past and stay to work with him in the USWA. "Hell, yeah," I told him, and we hugged and agreed that, to coin a phrase, "Fu– the past. Let's have some fun and make some money!"

For a while, we did just that. Eddie was a very intense, serious fellow with a hair-trigger temper. When he wasn't pissed off, Eddie was a great guy, but when it came to his temper, he was a

mini-Sid. I couldn't hold the one big mistake he made in his life (marrying the female Bruce Prichard, Missy Hyatt) against him. By this time, however, he had dumped her, so he was unhindered and ready to do the booking. He did a really good job, too. He let a few guys go and brought in some new talent that he hoped would get over. After a few weeks of reshuffling the talent, things were rolling along pretty well.

Gaylord was gone, Brickhouse Brown was sent packing, and a few others got their "pink slips." Of course, Jeff Jarrett, Bill Dundee, Jerry Lawler, and I were all there for the long run, as, of course, was Eddie Gilbert. The newcomers and/or returning favorites included: Danny Davis, Tojo (who had left for a while due to health problems), Brian Lee, Doug Gilbert (Eddie's brother), Dirty White Boy, "Hollywood" John Tatum, Ken Wayne, Chris Champion, the "New Kids" (Tony Williams and the future Grandmaster Sexy, Brian Christopher), and a few others. Eddie booked himself in the main event angle with Lawler. He put me with

Brian Lee, who was booked in a program with Jeff Jarrett, which was the guarantee of a good spot on the card.

I was happy. I kept my job, I was being used well, and the paychecks weren't bad. Eddie and I became pretty good friends. I used to go to Eddie's apartment in Bartlett (east Memphis) occasionally to drink a few beers and shoot the breeze with Eddie, Doug, and Eddie's good friend, John Gilliam. John was great guy from Eddie's hometown of Lexington, Tennessee, who stayed with Eddie a lot. We always had a good time.

One night, through a chance encounter, a big problem began, and things went from bad to worse as the evening progressed. It started off no different than any other night. I was drinking beer at Eddie's, with the understanding that if I got too drunk, instead of driving back to Mississippi, I could sleep on Eddie's couch. At least, that was the plan, until a young lady intervened in the situation, which was where my problems

began. As we all know, throughout history, whenever a good-looking chick comes around, nothing else seems to matter, and that was the case on this cold January evening. Eddie's "friend" had dropped by unexpectedly, and understandably, Eddie asked me if we could "reschedule" our hangout session for another time. Naturally, I wasn't going to stand in the way of Eddie having an evening of "conversation" with his lady friend, so I agreed.

If I had any common sense, everything would have been fine, but then again, this would have been a boring book, right? I wasn't drunk. I had only had two beers, so my blood alcohol level was well below the legal limit, and I could have easily driven my Lincoln to DeSoto County (about 20 miles). Also, if I had been so inclined, I could have bought more beer and drank all I wanted once I got back to the camper I was renting in Walls without any chance of getting into trouble. Well, common sense wasn't my strong point at that stage in my life, so naturally, I did what I thought was the

right thing to do: I went to my old hangout — Mugs!

What a brilliant idea. Even more brilliant was drinking 13 more beers and leaving Mugs promptly at 3 a.m., when beer sales were ending. A few miles down the road, with a cold Budweiser smuggled from the joint in the crotch of my pants, I crashed my Lincoln into a conveniently-placed telephone pole. It didn't take the Memphis Police Department long to make their appearance, and within minutes, off we went to the "Glamour Slammer," the nickname of the Shelby County Correctional Center at 201 Poplar in downtown Memphis. I was charged with DUI, reckless driving, failure to maintain control, speeding, driving too fast for conditions, and public intoxication. Before I was locked into a cell, they asked me to take the BAC (breathalyzer) test. Not knowing my rights like I do today, I blew into the device, and gave them all the evidence they needed for a conviction. I blew a 2.8, which is more than twice over the legal limit in the state of

Tennessee. I knew I was screwed right then and there.

Before they threw me into the drunk tank, I called Acue Wicks, whose bail-bond office was across the street from the correctional center, and he agreed to throw my bond (get me out). In Memphis, the law requires you to spend a minimum of five hours in lock-up before you can get out, which gives them enough time to search the NCIC (National Criminal Information Center) computer to make sure you aren't wanted anywhere else. That meant I had a wonderful night's sleep in store for myself at the "Glamour Slammer. Keep in mind: I was a weekly fixture on the highly-watched USWA TV show, so I was a very well-known figure in Memphis. That's not always a good thing, but in jail, it was a blessing in disguise. "Hey, Downtown Bruno! You sure are downtown now, ain't ya!," was the general greeting as I was processed into the drunk tank. Then, as is standard procedure, they performed a full body search, took my belt, took

the mug shots, fingerprints, and then, threw me into the drunk tank with more than 30 drunken morons like myself. Five hours, I soon discovered, was merely an average, and not a reality at 201 Poplar. As five hours turned into eight, and eight turned into 12, I wondered if I would ever get out.

I was fortunate that I was "Downtown Bruno" because the deputy jailers looked out for me in several ways. First of all, they kept me in "gen-pop" (general population) with the other drunks, instead of putting me into a one-man cell with two other guys, which is (or was, at least) the normal procedure. Gen-pop was right in the center of activity and was heavily supervised, so there wasn't much chance of getting hurt, raped, or any other nonsense. Also, of the two drunk tanks in gen-pop, they put me in the one that housed Alexander Bell, a habitual offender of some sort. Bell was as big as a house and the "leader of the pack," so to speak, among the cons at 201 Poplar. He was in pretty good with the jailers, and they had asked him to look out for me, which he

did. He told me which guys had "generic blood" (AIDS), and which guys were "holding" (not dope, but hidden gigs or razors). He also told me that as long as they knew he was my buddy, I would be okay, and he was right.

After an eternity of sitting with a group of what at times grew to be about 45 other cons, "Bruno Lauer" sounded over the PA speaker, and they came to take me to the release area. I thanked Mr. Bell for looking out for me and gave him the remainder of my Newports, which were as valuable as gold in the joint. I then followed the blue line to the "spring" area, where I waited to get sprung. I sat on a bench next to about seven other guys who were on their way out, too. I noticed a sign on the wall behind the glass that read simply, This is not Burger King. This is the county jail. We have it our way. How true that was. Nothing in jail happens quickly, and everything is a slow process (a lot like the wrestling business). After about 45 minutes, they called my name, and handed me a plastic sack that

held my personal effects. After signing a few papers, I hit the pavement. The first thing I did was walk across the street and pay Acue his fee. From there, I walked up to Beale Street and ate like a glutton (jail food sucked). Now that I was car-less, I called Eddie Gilbert and asked him to come pick me up on Beale Street, which he did. I had to be back at 201 Poplar the following morning for my arraignment in court, so Eddie kindly said I could use his second car as long as I needed. What a great guy! I spent the night (sober, no less) at Eddie's and met my lawyer, Bill Massey, in front of Judge Charles Gallagher's courtroom at nine o'clock in the morning.

To make a long story short, I got a slap on the wrist, which naturally, I liked, but it didn't do a thing to deter me from a life of stupidity concerning my combination of little, brown bottles and big, dangerous, motor vehicles. The judge sentenced me to 48 hours in the joint, minus time served, which left me with 32 hours owed to the county, and a $1,000 fine. I put in my time in the joint,

paid my fine, and gave Massey five bills. I was also put on probation for one year, with the threat of 45 days with a bullet (straight time) if I messed up while I was on probation. Lawler never found out about that particular arrest. If he had, he probably would have gone nuts. Lawler hated both drinking and drunks, and he definitely wouldn't have been happy about having one of his TV personalities being arrested for drunk driving.

It's too bad that Lawler found out about the next one. It's also too bad that it happened so soon after the first one. However, it's a good thing that I had a competent lawyer, and that he had gone a long way to smarten me up to the system. Unfortunately, he stopped short of teaching me not to drink and drive!

While I still had Eddie's car, I thought it would be fun to drive the 45 miles to Frenchman's Bayou, Arkansas, to visit my old buddy, Eddie "Boss" Winders. Eddie was a manager in the Memphis area. He managed "Rough and Ready" Cleo

Reeves and "Tuff and Steady" Larry Reeves in the AAW and USWA. He also managed Brian Christopher (when Brian first broke into the business under a hood), Don Bass, Soultaker (who later went on to become Papa Shango/Godfather in the WWF), and a tag team known as "Twilight Zone." Along with Otis "The Coach" Boggs, he was also co-promoter of Arkansas All-Star Wrestling and Razorback All-Star Wrestling. Eddie and I had a lot in common. He loved to smoke pot and I loved to drink beer. Eddie smoked about four joints, while I sat and pounded down three quarts of semi-warm Schaeffer Beer that Eddie had stashed in his cooler. By the time I was ready to leave, I was too drunk to use my head, and Eddie … well, Eddie was a head, so instead of staying around the van until I got straight, I bummed another quart from him and started trucking back to the Bluff City in Eddie Gilbert's car, with a warm quart of beer between my legs.

I made it through Arkansas just fine, but as soon

as I crossed the new bridge into Memphis, blue lights started to flash in my rear view mirror. Damn! I was screwed, and I knew it. As the MPD cruiser closed in on me, I did what I figured was the right thing to do. Pull over? No! I took off down I-240 like a bat out of hell! It was like a scene from The Dukes of Hazzard, only on the mean streets of downtown Memphis instead of Hazzard County, Georgia. Anyway, I'm not a bad person like Bruce Prichard. I'm a good person who has done some really stupid things, and that was right up there at the top of the list of stupid things. It would have been perfect for a filming of the TV show, Cops. I flew down I-240 at 70 and 80 miles per hour, then took the Jackson Avenue exit and headed east. They finally wore me down and caught up to me at the intersection of Jackson and Hollywood with six MPD cruisers. Anyone who knows anything about the city of Memphis knows that Jackson and Hollywood is at least four miles from where the pursuit initiated.

I knew I was in real trouble, no question about

it. A group of north Memphis residents of the African-American persuasion gathered to watch the fun. As I complied with the boys in blue and got out of the car with my hands raised, one of the observers helpfully pointed out, with a gleeful tone in his voice, "That's Downtown Bruno!" What a humiliation. I went from TV star to felon in one fell swoop. Yeah, I was Downtown Bruno, and downtown was exactly where I was headed. I knew without a doubt that I would pull 45 days for VOP (violation of probation), but I didn't know what other punishment I would receive. I was cuffed and booked into my former residence, 201 Poplar, with a long list of charges: DWI, DUI, reckless driving, evading arrest, resisting arrest, speeding, and for good measure, they included shooting Abraham Lincoln. I wasn't going to jail. I was going under the jail! I made two calls: Bill Massey and Eddie Gilbert. Massey made sure I didn't repeat my previous error and take the breathalyzer (I didn't), and he arranged for Acue Wicks to throw my bond … again. I was scared to death that Eddie Gilbert would be furious at me for

getting arrested and having his car impounded, but he was surprisingly forgiving and patient with me. He even came (again) and picked me up when I was finally bonded out. This time, however, I didn't expect to get off as easily as the time before, but I knew that I deserved whatever I got.

When my day of reckoning arrived, it was a mixed bag. Massey got the DWI and DUI dismissed because I didn't blow into the tube. (Never, under any circumstances, blow into the tube! You are giving the prosecution evidence against yourself! Don't ever do it, no matter what! Even more importantly, DON'T DRINK AND DRIVE!) Massey also convinced the DA to dismiss every charge except reckless driving, and we plea bargained it down to a $500 fine, which I could live with. I still had my VOP, which was indefensible since I had a guilty plea now for reckless driving, so I had 45 straight days staring me right in the face. The court set the date of my incarceration to begin three weeks from the date of my guilty plea. That was probably the lowest

point in my life. I was a repeat jailbird and a drunken idiot. Tommy Lane, a good friend of mine and a former RPM with my old buddy, Mike Davis, drove me to the penal farm, a big, sprawling, prison complex in east Memphis. When I was released 45 days later, Tommy was there to pick me up.

Chapter 14
Bruno and the Baby

At the time, I didn't know whether or not I still had a job with the USWA, although Eddie Gilbert, who I stayed in touch with while I did my time, told me he would do what he could to work things out for me. On the first Saturday morning of my freedom, a friend named Zeke Rivers drove me to Channel 5. I walked hesitantly into the studio, not knowing quite what to expect. Lawler greeted me, and along with Eddie Gilbert, we went into commentator (and WMC-TV 5 weatherman) Dave Brown's office to talk. I thought probation, AA meetings, random drug tests, and community service were tough, but Lawler's consequences were murder! Yes, I still had a job, but at a price. My new, temporary home was the guest house in Lawler's back yard, where there was no drinking allowed, no smoking allowed, no telephone, and no plumbing. I was also required to

drive Lawler (in his van) to all the towns, do his yard work, and run his errands. I was grateful to Lawler for giving me back my job, and for giving me a place to live, but the only time I had fun was when Lawler wasn't booked. On those nights, I rode to the towns with Eddie Gilbert, and he allowed me to drink beer.

Even after paying my fines and legal fees, I still had substantial savings in the bank. I used some of my savings to buy a 5-speed Toyota Tercel. It wasn't my Lincoln, though, and that really hurt. I also bought a two-acre piece of property in DeSoto County. I was overjoyed! I finally owned a piece of Mississippi. It was two acres of bare, empty land, but it was "my" land.

I had come to the realization that something had to change in my life. I wanted to straighten up and act like an adult should. I deserved better than to live in a "house" where I had to go to the back yard when I had to take a squirt. I didn't want to go to the Exxon station when I had to take a dump, or

drive to Buddy Wayne's house to shower and shave.

Things took a turn for the worse in January, 1991, when Eddie Gilbert quit the booking job. A few weeks later, Jerry Jarrett came to Memphis from Nashville and told Lawler that he had hired a new booker for USWA. It was Eric Embry, the guy who had booked the Dallas territory for Jerry. If you look up the phrase "horse turd" in your encyclopedia, there is a picture of Eric Embry next to it. Jerry Jarrett is like a father to me, and to this day I love him dearly, but I never understood some of his business decisions. I had been in the business (at the time of Embry's hiring) for almost 12 years, and I had no idea of why Little Man chose Embry. Today, 17 years later, I still don't understand. Embry, with an extreme case of bookeritis, immediately booked himself on top. He was so bad that Lawler eventually refused to work with him and took a three-month vacation. I'm sure his plan was to give Eric full control and let him fail miserably, at which point

Lawler would return, take over the book, and get rid of him.

With Lawler out of the picture, Jeff Jarrett became the main event babyface, so naturally, Embry put himself into an angle with Jeff. Jeff was the owner's son, but he didn't just sit on his rear end and collect his money like other promoters' sons. Jeff trained hard in the gym, worked hard in the ring, and had a great tan. Embry, on the other hand, was flabby, an average worker, and had a pale complexion. He had dyed-blonde hair and, with his black roots showing all too prominently, it was way overdue for a treatment. He was at least 40 pounds overweight, and he always had a wad of tobacco in his mouth.

On May 13, 1991, in Memphis, Eric had me do a squash job for a new girl he had brought into the USWA, Miss Texas (she was later known in the WWE as Jacqueline). I didn't like it, but being an ex-con who was happy to have a job, I did what he asked. He had me get beaten up, get juice, get

beat, and get thrown out of the ring by her. Four weeks later, he had Dirty White Girl, a tiny, skinny (but very pretty) girl throw Miss Texas around the ring like a rag doll, and worked a disqualification, instead of having a winner by pinfall. I was livid. I got squashed by Miss Texas, but Miss Texas got squashed by a tiny girl who didn't even belong in the ring. The real loser here was — me!

Before I had an opportunity to complain, more chaos erupted. Embry had Doug Gilbert get squashed by 65-year-old Gypsy Joe, and Doug didn't take it well. Doug wadded up his booking sheet, threw it in Embry's face, and said, "Go fu– yourself."

I went to my friend, head promoter Eddie Marlin, and asked him what I should do, because I was getting fed up with the way I was being treated. To this day, I am so grateful to Eddie, because he gave me a position in the office and told me to give Embry my two-week notice. That move absolutely changed my life. I would remain with the USWA

as a referee and head of the ring crew. I was now untouchable by the booker. For the next two weeks, however, I was still a manager, and Embry took this as a green light to really screw with me. Embry brought in Bill Dundee's son, Jamie, who was wrestling as J.C. Ice, and told me to put him over. Embry knew that if I quit, or refused to follow orders during that two-week period, I would lose my so-called "office" spot. I knew that he would have loved that because I had figured out Embry's plan by that point. He was trying to screw all of Lawler's guys, and he knew that I was one of the main ones.

Well, I was too smart for him. The fans didn't like Jamie Dundee. He was skinny, he was ugly, and he was obnoxious. How did Embry ever expect to get him over as a babyface? It wasn't going to happen. Embry wasn't going to do anything to help me, so I decided to help myself. I had been a heel with good heat for more than 12 years, and as everybody in our business knows, the hotter you are as a heel, the more you'll get over

when you switch to babyface. My job in the match was to make Jamie shine, but when the bell rang for the match to begin, I decided to make myself shine. I viciously attacked him (in a working way). I kicked, punched, elbowed, clotheslined, slammed, and tackled him all over the ring. I then turned, walked back to the dressing room, and gave Eric Embry the finger, as the entire Memphis crowd chanted, "Bruno! Bruno! Bruno!" I had made my point.

Oh, yes. I have failed to mention that nothing was hot in the USWA at the time. Business was so bad that the Monday night show in Memphis was moved from the Mid-South Coliseum to the Pipkin Building, a small building at the Mid-South Fairgrounds where the flea market was held. Embry was the booker, and he booked himself in the main event, so the drop in business was his fault. Jerry Lawler came in and out of the territory. Eddie and Doug Gilbert both left. Embry was left with guys like 65-year-old Gypsy Joe, Tom Prichard (a good worker, but

who, for whatever reason, tried to talk, act, and work like Roddy Piper), and the Texas Hangmen (two green guys who wore masks and couldn't work).

Embry also claimed to be an admirer of Tojo, so he decided to make Tojo his manager, but he treated Tojo with disdain. Instead of giving Tojo a Halliburton briefcase to carry to the ring, Embry wrapped a cheap suitcase with aluminum foil. He also gave Tojo a big, straw cowboy hat and called him "Cowboy Tojo." He made Tojo look like an idiot, and it was sad to see because Tojo took a great deal of pride in himself and his past contributions to the wrestling business. He told me that he was humiliated and embarrassed. Granted, Embry was providing him with a payday, but in the process, he took away Tojo's dignity. Near the end of 1991, Tojo got sick and was diagnosed with kidney stones. A few months later, on February 19, 1992, he put the barrel of a gun into his mouth and pulled the trigger. Everybody said he did it because he couldn't deal with the pain of the

kidney stones, but that's total BS. In or out of the business, Tojo was one of the toughest men I ever knew. In my opinion, Eric Embry drove Tojo to desperation when he took away his legacy and turned him into a cartoon character. Embry, I hope you're proud of yourself. I don't hope you die. I think living with what you did is far worse punishment.

It's sad to see how some of the legends wound up when they got old and were unable to wrestle. In addition to managing, Tojo worked at a video arcade. I don't think any job is beneath me, but how demeaning was that to somebody who, at one time, had been one of the biggest drawing cards in the history of professional wrestling in Tennessee, Kentucky, and Alabama? Homer O'Dell, another manager who had a modicum of success in Tennessee, Georgia, and the Carolinas, drove a cab in Nashville, shuttling junkies and prostitutes to and fro. Tony Falk sold concessions at a prison in Nashville. Mr. Fuji, a legendary wrestler and manager during the golden era of the WWWF,

drove a cab until his health was so bad that he couldn't continue. It's a sad commentary on our business.

After my match with Jamie, Embry had no choice but to turn Jamie heel and use me as a little, fiery babyface. Jamie and I had every kind of match imaginable: boxing matches, wrestling matches, lumberjack matches, tag team matches, and matches where the loser would get his head shaved. We even did a deal where Jamie disowned his father, Bill Dundee. Bill and I became a tag team, and we took on the team of Jamie Dundee and his new partner, "Stunning" Steve Austin, in a match where the person pinned could no longer wrestle in the USWA. We had a great match. For the finish, after Austin beat me down and I got color [blood], Jamie pinned me and put an end to my USWA wrestling career. That match was notable to me for one reason: I got to experience the talent of Steve Austin first-hand, and after the match, I told him that he would one day be a superstar. If you ever meet him, ask

him. He'll tell you that it's true. I just knew it. Steve wanted to make it in the wrestling business in the worst way. He took a bus from Dallas to work the Memphis territory. He would sit in a corner of the dressing room and eat spaghetti and potatoes from a plastic bowl, which he had heated with hot water from the sink. I don't have to elaborate on how his career turned out. Every wrestling fan knows the story of "Stone Cold" Steve Austin.

I immediately began my job of supervising the ring crew and refereeing the shows. I had to interact with Embry because he gave me the finishes, but other than that, my boss was Eddie Marlin.

With me no longer in a position to help draw money, and with Lawler still out of the territory, the USWA needed a shot in the arm. Jeff Jarrett was spending most of his time in Texas, helping headline Jerry Jarrett's "satellite" promotion, so Memphis needed a hot babyface. Thankfully, "Hot

Stuff' Eddie Gilbert agreed to return. I was really glad to see Eddie. He was a great talent who knew exactly what the fans in the Memphis territory wanted. Evidently, the absence from home made his heart grow fonder, so Eddie was really happy to be back in the USWA. On the other hand, it didn't take Eddie long to develop a hatred for Eric Embry. Well, Embry had a knack for getting heat with everybody in the territory, so why should Eddie be any different than anybody else? Embry also brought Eddie's brother, Doug, back to the territory so he and Eddie could work with the Texas Hangmen.

The Hangmen's work sucked. Not only did they suck, but they were cocky and thought they knew everything. To make matters worse, in the ring, they refused to sell. That got over with the Gilberts like a turd floating in the water cooler. The friction between the two teams came to a head in Ripley, Tennessee, one night, when the Hangmen sent me to the babyface dressing room (we had separate dressing areas, which was often

the case in the USWA) to tell the Gilberts, "Tell Eddie and Doug that we'll call the match tonight. They should just listen to us." It was a prime example of outsiders (real outsiders) disrespecting the homeboys. First of all, Eddie was a true veteran of the business, and he had been a successful booker in many territories. Doug also had a few years under his belt, with experience in Japan, Puerto Rico, Texas, Alabama, and Tennessee, so it was an insult for the Hangmen to tell Eddie and Doug that they were going to run the match. I'm proud to have been the one to help stir things up, even though what occurred wasn't my fault.

The Texas Hangmen were the first to get into the ring. When Eddie and Doug ran towards the ring, they picked up metal folding chairs and took them into the ring. What an attack! If anybody in Ripley thought wrestling was "fake," they sure changed their minds that night. Eddie and Doug pounded the chairs over the heads of the Hangmen. There wasn't any question of the Hangmen not

selling. Eddie and Doug hit them hard … for real! I never saw anybody hit like that again until Mankind's episode with the Rock many years later. That situation was identical, only the incident in Ripley was two on two, instead of one on one, and the attack was not planned ahead of time. For all intents and purposes, it was as real as real gets.

There was a lot of dissension in the USWA at this time, and things weren't getting any better. I always arrived at the towns early to supervise the ring and seating set-up. Many times, I also would open up the box office for Eddie Marlin and sell tickets, which kept him from having to get there early. I had to be there, anyway, so I was happy to do it.

One day in July 1991, as I sat in the box office in Jasper, Indiana, the telephone rang. That wasn't unusual. There were always a lot of calls to the box office on the day of the show, mostly from fans who had questions about ticket prices, the lineup,

the bell time, etc. I was used to answering those questions. This phone call, however, was one that I didn't expect. It was Sabrina Eudy, Sid's wife, calling me from Atlanta. I was shocked because, due to the fact that we were no longer living in the same general area, and we were busy with our personal schedules, we hadn't remained in very close contact. We would send birthday and Christmas cards, but that was about it. Sid and his family had moved from the greater Memphis area to Atlanta, where he went to work for WCW. I was curious to know how Sabrina managed to track me down in Jasper, Indiana. The lady really did her homework. She had called Buddy Wayne, a long-time USWA promoter and friend, and asked him if he knew how to reach me. He told her that I was living in a "shed" behind Lawler's house and gave her Lawler's number. She then called Lawler, who confirmed that I was staying in his "guest quarters," but that I had been on the road since Tuesday morning, and he didn't know when I'd be back. He told Sabrina that I would definitely be back for TV on Saturday, and added

the fact that Jasper was running that night (Thursday), and that she could probably get the number of the arena from the operator. When she finally heard my voice on the phone, she seemed to be relieved.

Her first question was to ask what I had on my schedule for three weeks from that day. I told her that it never varied much: Monday, Memphis; Tuesdays, Louisville; Wednesday, Evansville; Thursday and Friday were spot shows that could have been anywhere in a six-state radius, Saturday morning was Memphis TV; Saturday was Nashville or Jonesboro; Sunday was my only day off. She told me the reason she called was that Sid had asked her to track me down to see if I would be interested in making a move to another territory. I hesitated with my answer. I never had any desire to leave Memphis and live in Atlanta, where WCW was based. I had just bought some land, and I wanted to develop and live on it. When I explained that to Sabrina, she quickly said, "No, Sid is no longer with WCW. He's about to start

with the WWF. He heard through the grapevine that they wanted to hire a new manager, so he arranged for you to get a tryout in Worcester, Massachusetts. If you're interested, you need to be there in three weeks."

Was I interested? Holy cow! Was I ever interested! Just when I thought I would be setting up rings and selling tickets for Eddie Marlin until the day of my death, I was looking at the opportunity of a lifetime. I thanked Sabrina and told her I would call Sid at his home in Atlanta on Sunday. I wasn't yet ready for Lawler, Jerry Jarrett, or Eddie Marlin to know, just in case things didn't work out, so on Sunday, I called Sid from Buddy Wayne's house. Sid confirmed that he had a tryout date set for me in Worcester [pronounced "Wooster"], but he stressed that it was only a tryout. Nothing was guaranteed. I had to impress Vince McMahon, Pat Patterson, and J.J. Dillon, or I would return to setting up rings in places like Evening Shade, Arkansas, for the rest of my life. Sid wanted me to drive to Atlanta

about three days before my shot, then fly with him to New England. I was just a southern redneck who wasn't used to a big territory like the WWF, and he wanted to be with me so I wouldn't feel awkward or nervous.

After I assured Sid that I would be there at the appointed time, I thanked him and hung up. I knew at that point that if I could impress the people in the WWF, there was a genuine chance that I would actually get a starting date and a spot on the talent roster. I had paid my dues and I had learned a lot during my 12 years of pounding the asphalt. I was finally being given the opportunity to do something big, and I was determined that I wouldn't mess up the opportunity. I knew I was a good manager, and I was finally getting a chance to prove it. I thought it was rather ironic that in 12 years of managing all over the country, I never got a call from New York, but after six or seven weeks of setting up the ring and selling tickets, here comes the call. Go figure!

When I arrived at the Pipkin Building at 6:30 on Monday morning, like I always did, I followed my normal routine: I went to the switch box and turned on all the lights in the building, except the ring lights. After turning on the box office coffee pot to start the coffee brewing, I drove over to McDonald's on Parkway, across from the building, and bought an Egg McMuffin and hash browns to go. I returned to the building and ate my breakfast, then went to the dressing room and took a shower, letting the hot water pound down on my severely damaged neck. That's how I begin my day every day. My neck is in such bad shape, and hurts so much, that it often brings me to tears. Back then, the pain was just starting to kick in, but today, it's ten times as bad. I can't point to any one, particular incident that caused my neck problem. Rather, it was an accumulation of the abuse I took in the ring over the years. Managers took 90% of their bumps from the ring apron to the floor, and unlike today, there were no pads on the floor.

After my long shower, I would go into the arena where the ring crew, "White Boy" Bobby and Chilly Willy, would already be unloading the ring parts off the huge metal wagons where they were stored. The heavy pieces hitting the bare cement floor of the cavernous, empty building made an eerily familiar sound, as they landed with a loud "whack" that echoed over and over. Bobby and Chilly were two of the hardest workers anybody could ever hope to find. I was lucky to have them. Setting up the ring was a backbreaking, tiresome job, a job for which they were paid just $15 each per day.

Chilly was an underdeveloped, 16-year-old, black kid from the ghetto. He lived in Claiborne Homes, a housing project in south Memphis, which was a rough part of town. Bobby was an 18-year-old, 6-foot tall, skinny, white kid, who lived with his black girlfriend in Lauderdale Courts, a housing project in Downtown Memphis. Being the only "white boy" in the projects earned him the name "White Boy Bobby." The three of us called

ourselves the "Breakfast Club," since we met so early for work each week. Those two guys were like my kids, and I felt like a daddy to them. Our little clique meant a lot to me, and I almost felt as if running off to New England was a betrayal to them. They didn't have much in the world, and I'd like to think they needed me.

As was the normal process, after they unloaded everything from the carts, we went to the back room, where we ate a meal of soup and sandwiches before we started setting up the heavy monster of a ring. While we ate, Chilly, who was never big on subtlety, exclaimed, "Something's the fu– wrong with you, boy. You ain't acting right. What's up?"

I wanted to keep it to myself, but I just had to tell my little family what was happening. When I did, they had conflicting reactions. They were happy for me, and told me how much I deserved a big break, but at the same time, they were worried about how my potential absence would affect their

job. I told them to keep the information to themselves and that I would do everything I could to work out something for them with Eddie Marlin. As promised, they kept it quiet … until nine o'clock, when Mr. Coffey arrived to open the box office. It has always been a well-known fact in the Memphis territory that if Mr. Coffey knew a secret, it wouldn't be a secret for long. This would be no exception. Two hours later, Lawler very uncharacteristically showed up at the Pipkin Building and said he wanted to talk to me. We had the ring partly assembled, so I told Chilly and Bobby to go get something to drink at McDonald's and come back in 30 minutes.

My conversation with Lawler showed me what a great guy he really is. I thought he was going to curse me out and forbid me to attend the tryout, but he actually showed genuine happiness for me. He told me that my hair looked shaggy, so he wanted me to come to his house later that day so he could give me a haircut. He wanted me to make a good first impression with the powers-that-be in the

WWF. He also told me that he would buy me some new clothes, and that I could pay him back when I began receiving my regular WWF paychecks. I was happily surprised. I showed him my appreciation with a sincere hug and handshake, but I told him I had a lot of apprehension about leaving the USWA, and that I was worried about my "kids." If they weren't taken care of, I would feel very badly about leaving them. Lawler interrupted me and told me, with all seriousness, that if I "passed" my tryout and was offered a job, and I chose to remain in the USWA, I would be fired. I was devastated, until I realized that Lawler knew this was the biggest opportunity I had ever been given, and he wasn't going to sit back and let me screw it up just so I could take care of Bobby and Chilly. He assured me that he would keep them on even if I left. He also told me that, in the event that Vince and company didn't want me in the WWF, I would always have a place to return. Taking all of that into consideration, I felt pretty good about things.

Later that night, Lawler told everybody about my opportunity, so I was pretty much the center of attention in the dressing room. Eddie Marlin really went head over heels for me. He told me he never knew anybody who deserved a break more than I did, and that he had always known that I would make it to the "big time." He said his only regret was losing the "best damn ring crew supervisor he ever knew." I told him not to write me off just yet. I was only guaranteed a tryout, and not a contract. "Yeah, sure," Eddie replied with a grin. Everybody had confidence in me, which made me feel good. Even Little Man gave me a thumbs up, and also reassured me that I would have a place to hang my hat if things didn't go my way.

I made the rest of my shots as scheduled, but my last shot before I left for Atlanta was at the arena in French Lick, Indiana. Chilly, Bobby, and I set up the ring, and, as usual, I refereed all of the matches. After the show, we broke down the ring and I prepared to drive all the way (or as far as I

could) to Atlanta. Chilly and Bobby were going to ride to Owensboro, Kentucky, with Eddie Marlin and spend the night there, then ride with him to Memphis for Saturday's TV.

I was about to embark on a scary, new adventure, without Eddie Marlin, without Chilly and Bobby, without Lawler, and without the USWA security blanket that I had grown used to.

In all the time I've known Eddie Marlin, he only made me mad one time. One day, about six months prior to my potential WWF break, Springfield, Tennessee, was scheduled for a Wednesday night. On that afternoon, a redneck-looking guy with a baby showed up at a Baptist Church in Springfield, claiming to be me. He told the preacher that he had no money. He wanted to know if the church would loan him $50 because he needed food for his baby and gasoline for his vehicle. He promised to repay the loan after he worked that night at the Civic Center. Of course, he never repaid the preacher, and, of course, the

church called the USWA office to tell Jerry Jarrett what "Downtown Bruno" did. Jerry told Eddie, who in turn yelled at me and fired me. He said he was ashamed of me for doing such a thing. It hurt my feelings that Eddie would believe a cockamamie story like that. I kept thinking, "Where in the hell did he think I would I get a damn baby?" I drove all the way to Hendersonville (where Eddie lived) and convinced Eddie to ride with me to Springfield. I wanted the preacher to see me and tell Eddie that I wasn't the lowlife who had scammed them out of $50. When the preacher verified it, Eddie apologized and "unfired" me. All was forgiven, and Eddie and I remain close to this day. I loved Eddie, and I still do. I'll never forget him for allowing me to continue to work in the territory. Thank you, Eddie, from the bottom of my heart.

As I set out for Atlanta, and, eventually, my tryout in New England, I got the same tears in my eyes that I got the previous time I left the Memphis

territory. I was excited, scared, and I missed Chilly and Bobby, but I was ready for whatever lay ahead.

Chapter 15
The Big Time

I left French Lick and drove straight to Birmingham, Alabama. Arriving around six o'clock in the morning, I checked into the same motel where Sid and I had stayed several years before. I was so exhausted from the trip that it didn't matter where I was. I just wanted a bed to lie down on. I slept until almost noon, and after breakfast, I got on I-20 East and headed for Atlanta. As I drove, I said a few prayers. I felt I needed all the help I could get, both with Sid and in my New England tryout. As I approached "Hot-Lanta," as Michael Hayes called it, I stopped at a rest area to call Sid's house. I had never been to Atlanta, so I had no idea of how to get there. A short while after getting directions, I pulled up in front of his rental house and went inside.

Sid was preparing to move back to the Memphis

area, which was one of the greatest benefits of working for the WWF. They allowed you to live where you wanted to live, not like WCW, who demanded that you live in the "company" town. Sid and Sabrina took me to the Lenox Square Mall in the Buckhead area of Atlanta, and bought me a couple of nice outfits. They didn't want me to walk into WWF headquarters wearing my early 1980s clothing. Sid also took me to the New York Suit Exchange, a high-end haberdashery for businessmen, and bought me a seersucker suit that he wanted me to wear during my tryout. He had the tailor hem it up so it appeared to be about two sizes too small for me. Since my debut was within a couple of months of the Pee-wee Herman masturbation incident, Sid made sure that my bow-tie and shoes were similar to those worn by Pee-wee. Sid paid for everything; with the agreement that I would pay him back in full when (hopefully) I got hired by the WWF.

When the morning of our trip to New England arrived, we got up early, ate breakfast, and went to

the Hartsfield Atlanta International Airport. Our flight was uneventful and we landed as scheduled in Boston, from which we made the short drive to Worcester. When we arrived at the Worcester Centrum Center (the arena), I saw wrestlers everywhere. I was happy to see some of the guys that I hadn't seen in years, such as the Bushwhackers, Tugboat [Fred Ottman], Jimmy Hart, Jimmy Snuka, and Marty Jannetty. The familiarity with those guys helped ease the tension I felt at being in a new environment. I was also pleased to meet a lot of guys whose paths I had never crossed.

One of the first WWF executives I met that day was Pat Patterson. I had spoken to Pat many times over the years as I tried to work my way into the company, but that was the first time we had actually met in person. Pat was very friendly and easygoing, and he made me feel right at home. Pat was, and is, a great guy, and to this day, we share a great friendship. He is also a tremendous businessman who has a real gift for understanding

the psychology of our business.

As the day went along, I met many other executives, bosses, and agents. In no particular order, I met J.J. Dillon, who was the "go to" man in the talent/booking department (which is now called Talent Relations). I had spoken to J.J. many times over the years and I was glad to finally meet him face to face. I liked him a lot, and over the next several years, he became very instrumental in the direction of my career. Although J.J. was stern, reserved, and had a very serious demeanor, he was a good guy to work under, and he always treated me well. I have absolutely nothing bad to say about him. He had a volatile parting of the ways with the WWF a few years later, but is currently doing well working for the Delaware Department of Corrections.

I also met Chief Jay Strongbow [Joe Scarpa]. I had met him a few years before in Alabama when he came to visit his son, Mark Young [Mark Scarpa], who was working there. It was just a

brief introduction and we didn't really get to know each other, so our meeting in Worcester was almost like a first meeting. I liked Chief a lot, too, and we grew to become close friends as time went by.

In his own odd, dry, sarcastic way, Chief was a very entertaining guy. He had a practice of giving entertaining nicknames to the wrestlers, and he matched the nickname to their looks or personalities. Sid was "Cantaloupes," because Chief thought Sid's massive shoulders looked like cantaloupes. The 1-2-3 Kid (X-Pac) was "Trailer" because of the way he followed the top guys around. British Bulldog was "Robot," due to his stout, muscular build and stiff way of walking (and his lack of a neck). Vince McMahon was "Caesar," for obvious reasons. Chief would also refer to Vince as "Emperor." Hulk Hogan was the "Goose that laid the golden egg." Rene Goulet was "J.P. Morgan," because he still had the first dime he ever made, and saved every nickel that touched his palm.

Shawn Michaels was "Teaspoon," but I have no earthly idea why the Chief chose that name for him. Curt Hennig, who was always up to mischief, like tying peoples' shoelaces together, was "Dennis the Menace." Kevin Nash, who was known as Diesel at the time, was "Big D." Earl Hebner was "Baby Earl." I can only assume that when the Hebner twins were born, Dave Hebner dropped out before Earl, so Chief considered Earl to be the baby. Pat Patterson was "Wimpy," but I'll plead the Fifth as to his reasons why. Kamala was "Hogman," because he owned pigs. Butch Reed, who had purchased a large tract of land somewhere, was "Land Baron."

John Tenta was "Boom-Boom" because he made a "boom-boom" racket when he would jump up and down in the ring before he went into his finish. Paul Bearer was "Pooh Bear," which was a play on words because to the Chief, "Paul Bearer" sounded like "Pooh Bear." Terry Taylor was "Canary," a takeoff on Terry's "Red Rooster" gimmick. The ring crew — Jack Doan, John

D'Amico, and Tony Chimel — were known as "Jack Sprat," "John Brown," and "Chimmy-Cham." There were too many others to recall, but they were all entertaining.

Oh, yes. I was "Mr. Wipple."

Chief also had a way with words, and a lot of his phrases are still regularly used in the business today. Doing something funny, stupid, or playing a rib, was known to Chief as "playing ha-ha." Stupidity was "ga-ga." Drinking a few beers was "tipping the canoe." Odd circumstances or situations were "kabukish." In the Chief's mind, a lot of people were "on the right train, but the wrong track." A girl's private area was the "spinach patch." Having sex was known as "punching a girl in the bloomers." Chief described Jim Neidhart as a guy who could "get into a fight if he was in a room all by himself." The WWF office was "the shiny glass tower."

The only time I ever saw Chief at a loss for

words was after an incident involving the late, great, Owen Hart. One evening, Owen, who was a babyface, was working with I.R.S [Mike Rotundo]. As the match progressed, Owen clapped his hands and stomped his foot, getting the people riled up before he went on the offensive against his opponent. Of course, the people clapped along with Owen and got into the match. Chief, who was the agent for the match, had wrestled with an Indian gimmick for more than 15 years. When Owen got back to the dressing room, Chief called him over to the side. "Rocket!" said Chief. Rocket was Chief's nickname for Owen. "If you were in a street fight, would you clap your hands and look at the people who were watching?"

"No, Chief," replied Owen, in his usual humorous manner. "I'd probably break out into an Indian war dance!"

Of course, that was what the Chief used in his comeback for the majority of his career. Chief just

shook his head and walked away. That story is still making the rounds in dressing rooms today.

George "The Animal" Steele was another agent I met. He made a career out of shaving his head, painting his tongue green, and chewing up turnbuckles, and now he was trying to tell guys like Shawn Michaels and Owen Hart what was wrong with their matches. To add insult to injury, he did it in the cockiest, most condescending way, imaginable. He definitely wasn't a very likable guy, or even a good agent, and I think the office knew it, because he became a "casualty" a year or so later.

George and I got off on a bad foot with each other while we were in Europe, nine months after I started with the WWF. While in Europe, we traveled from town to town on buses. As we all lined up single file to exit the bus in Brussels, Belgium, taking our turns walking down the steps, I stood in front of Owen Hart and behind George Steele. As George started walking down the steps,

Owen reached past me and gave him a shove, and then, in typical Owen Hart fashion, he yelled at me for shoving "poor George" down the steps. Owen got to mess with a guy that he (or for that matter, most of the crew) didn't like. In doing so, he managed to switch the heat over onto me! Owen was a master at getting away with stuff like that. From that day on, I had heat with George. George and I eventually became friends, but I still think he was a lousy agent. Sorry, George. I've gotta call 'em like I see 'em.

Rene Goulet was another agent who I met that day. Rene was a nice guy and a good agent. He wasn't dumb, but his broken French-Canadian version of the English language made him sound like he was. I'd still like to know why he shaves a perfect circle on the top of his head. Jack Lanza, an agent who retired four years ago, is a really good guy with a great mind for the business. He bent over backwards for me since that first day, and that's something I will never forget. Tony Garea also works as an agent today. I consider

Tony to be a good friend of mine, even with his oddball sense of humor. I've never met anybody who could laugh as loud or as long at his own jokes, and I guess that's to his credit. At least he makes himself happy, even if nobody else got to share in the privilege.

There were a lot of other people in the mix that day, but the two most important people I met were Hulk Hogan and, of course, "Caesar," Vince McMahon. In all honesty, I wasn't disappointed at all with either one of them. I met Hulk a few hours before I met Vince. He walked into the room where I was sitting, with Brutus Beefcake stuck to his ass, like a suckerfish attached to the side of a shark. Hogan spoke graciously to everyone in the room. Beefcake spoke to everybody except me. In fact, he went out of his way to shun and ignore me, even to the point of looking away when he walked past me. Hogan, however, walked right over to me and extended his hand. To my surprise, he said, "Hey, Downtown Bruno. I've watched you give the King [Lawler] hell in Memphis for a long

time. I guess it's my turn now, huh?" That simple comment made me feel like a million dollars. Here was the number one guy in the entire wrestling business, and not only did he know who I was, but he took the time to make me feel welcome in his world. Hogan was, and IS, a true class act, and he will always have my respect and admiration.

When Beefcake saw Hogan speak to me, he suddenly managed to find the time to shake my hand. What a transparent, self-absorbed asshole. Beefcake, nobody ever respected you and nobody ever will. I hope you realize that. You can only get so far by riding somebody else's coattail; and sooner or later, you have to make your own way. You never did, and you never will.

Finally, about six o'clock in the evening, I was brought in to meet the "Emperor." I was petrified, but I found out in short order that there was no reason at all to feel that way. Vince seemed genuinely happy to see me. Unlike a marginally

successful dog turd like Beefcake, a truly successful individual like Vince doesn't put on airs. Vince was genuine and real. That was my first impression of him, and today, 18 years later, I have the exact same impression of him. Vince was, and is, a great guy. He really made me feel as though I was doing him a favor by being there. He thanked me for coming to Worcester, and promptly told me what he wanted to see in my tryout. To sum it up, he loved my deep, rough, semi-redneck, Mississippi accent. He wanted me to be the toughest, meanest, little bastard on the face of the earth. He wanted me to act like I was ten feet tall and bulletproof.

I was going to audition in a dark [non-televised] interview with "Mean" Gene Okerlund in front of the sold-out Centrum Center. It was the biggest opportunity of my career, and I was determined that I wouldn't blow it. I have to admit that I owe a lot of my success that night to Mean Gene being a good sport.

Being the professional that he was (and is), Gene immediately put the heat on me by announcing me as being from Mississippi and "not happy about being in Massachusetts." He then led me into an unrehearsed heel promo that, as things would turn out, ostensibly got me a job with the WWF. We parried insults back and forth. I insulted him. He insulted me. I insulted the wrestling fans. Finally, when I made the ludicrous statement that I was a lean and muscular 205 pounds, Gene told me that I didn't appear to be an ounce over 110 pounds. (In reality, at that time, I was a massive 140 pounds) When I told him to never question me again, he responded by telling me that he could talk to me any way he wanted, and there was nothing I could do about it. Remembering what Vince had told me, and also certainly not forgetting that this was the most important promo I would ever do in my life, a life-changing shot that could and would determine the entire direction of my life, I did what I felt I needed to do in order to rise up a level or so above the typical, cheap-heat heel. I reared back and brought my open palm across Mean

Gene's face. I don't know who was more shocked: Gene, for being slapped out of the blue sky, completely unplanned and unrehearsed, or me, who had taken such an obvious liberty with a man I had just met, and in a company I didn't yet even work for. After giving Gene a look as if to say, "I'm sorry, but I had to do it," I finished my promo and walked back through the curtain.

I was totally unprepared for the response I would get from the people backstage. Gino "Gorilla" Monsoon, the guy who basically directed traffic at the Gorilla position (more about him and the Gorilla position later), the "Deadman" (the Undertaker, whose "Chief" name was Deadman), J.J., Sid, and Pat Patterson, all seemed impressed with my little off-the-cuff shenanigan. When Vince called me to the side for a personal conference, my heart started beating like a jackhammer. I knew that what Vince said to me at that time could be the turning point in my career, or, possibly, be a one-way return ticket to the Breakfast Club. "You know, I didn't care for the slap," Vince said, and

my heart sank like a rock in a bathtub. However, what Vince said next was the real shocker. "You didn't hit him nearly hard enough! Bruno, I want you to come to Portland, Maine, tomorrow and cut the same promo, but this time, really lay that slap in!"

Holy cow! Vince thought I was good enough to warrant a second look. I didn't walk out of the Centrum Center that night. I floated out.

In Worcester, I had been introduced as Downtown Bruno, but on the following night in Portland, Vince told Gene to come up with a different name. He wanted something catchy and unusual. Bruno is my real name, and I had been "Downtown" Bruno for most of my career, but I was willing to be called anything if it got me a starting date. When Gene announced me as "Harvey Herman," I went right along with it. The promo went off so smoothly, and once again, I slapped poor Gene.

Later that evening, they had to make some adjustments of cameras and lights, so there was going to be a 10-minute gap of dead airtime. I was told they would normally throw a dark match into the ring to keep the audience from getting restless. They actually had two jobbers standing at the Gorilla position, ready to go into the ring to kill time, when Vince said, "No, send Harvey out there to do a little ad-libbing. Hit the ring and take the microphone away from Howard Finkel. Let's see how much heat you can get! We'll cue you when it's time to come back."

As I was about to walk through the curtain, Vince stopped me. "Does Harvey have a last name?," he asked aloud, to nobody in particular.

"Herman," replied Gorilla Monsoon.

"No, that's tied too closely to Pee-wee Herman. What else can we come up with?"

"How about Wipple?" asked Gene Okerlund.

"Great," said Vince, and the newly-born Harvey Wipple went out to cut a promo.

After flying back to Atlanta the next day, I got my car and began the long drive home to Memphis. When I stopped at a truck stop to call my friend Buddy Wayne, I was flabbergasted when Buddy told me the WWF had sent a contract to me via FedEx Overnight. They wanted me to sign it, have it notarized, and sent back to them immediately via FedEx. They also left instructions for me to appear for TV in Buffalo, New York in three weeks, and told me to call Pat Patterson to get the details.

I was in! After all the years of Stink-Asses, Bob Browns, Ed Faulks, roach motels, Mugs, crashed cars, jail terms, juice, crabs, parking lots, rings, Lia Maivias, Randy Haleses, Bill Dundees, and countless other characters, situations, and territories, I was finally able to cash in my dues and enter the world of WrestleMania, worldwide TV exposure, good paydays, and, as I would find

out only too well in the coming years, a lot of evil, jealous, greedy people, all hidden in sheep's clothing among the good, honest, helpful members of the WWF. The vast majority of the people I worked with in the WWF were good, honest people, but there was an ever-present evil minority that would occasionally rear their ugly heads. I'll elaborate on those people later, but for now, I'll continue to describe my initial foray into the WWF.

As instructed, I called Pat and was given instructions for my flight to Buffalo. The WWF had a prepaid ticket waiting for me at the airport that I could pick up whenever it was convenient. If I wanted, I could even wait and pick it up on the day of travel, but I was so excited that I couldn't wait. I picked it up within an hour of my conversation with Pat. Pat also told me how much I would be paid each week for the time I sat at home between TV shows. Once I became established with the heel I would be managing, they would put my guy into an angle and I would go

"on the road."

When I asked Pat who I would be managing, he told me that I would be with a guy named "Big Bully" Busick, a former policeman who was also a powerlifter. He got his start in wrestling in Joe Pedicino's Global Wrestling Federation. I had seen him on the GWF TV show, but never paid much attention to him. After finishing my conversation with Pat, I immediately called Sid and asked him to give me the low-down on Busick. He told me he had worked with Busick quite a bit in Atlanta, so he pulled a few strings and got him booked. He went on to say that he thought Busick would be a good guy for me to manage because his work was decent and he looked impressive.

The truth of the matter is that Busick was nothing close to being a good worker. I hate to sound so negative, but the facts speak for themselves. The day I met him, I knew he didn't belong in the WWF. Not only did he not have a mind for the

business, but he didn't even know the proper terminology. When he would talk over his match, he would talk about going on the offensive and his opponent's defense. That was ridiculous. In our business, when the heel goes on the "offensive," he gets his "heat." When the babyface made his "defense," which was the idiotic term Bully used, it was his "comeback." How was I going to work with a guy who didn't know enough about the business to understand even the most simple terminology? After all the years of hard work and dedication I had put in to earn a spot in the WWF (the Promised Land), I couldn't stand to see an undeserving musclehead like Nick Busick working under the WWF banner.

It's almost like the winners of "WWE Tough Enough." I'm sorry. I know I'll ruffle some feathers here, but I know that Vince McMahon respects honesty, and I'm being honest. The manufactured dues that the "Tough Enough" people "paid" are bullsh–. My book should be required reading for the people who, based on their

performances on "Tough Enough," were given opportunities with the WWE. That is an insult to everybody who spent years paying their dues in the business. Nobody set up a make-believe "obstacle course" for us. I personally spent 12 years in the business, getting myself into a position where I could just get a "tryout" with the WWE. Maven, the winner of the first season of "Tough Enough," is a nice guy, but to be blunt, he didn't deserve the opportunity he was given. Before the WWF, my whole career was developmental, and I didn't get paid to learn. I paid my dues while I learned. For 12 years, I took bumps on cement floors, got whacked with chairs, got hit over the head with 2x4s, was back-dropped, piledriven, and suplexed. So Maven, you're one lucky guy.

Anyway, I feel like Dennis Miller … off on a rant. Back to Busick.

As a wrestler, he would have made a good used-car salesman. In other words, he was in the wrong business. He had matches with Koko B. Ware,

Bret Hart, and Jim Neidhart, who were all above-average workers. To have a stinkeroo of a match with any of them, you really were the sh–ts. Bret came to me and said I should "take that guy back where you found him." That really upset me, because I DIDN'T FIND HIM! I didn't even know him! That comment really made me resent Busick because I was being painted with his brush, and I didn't deserve it. To make matters worse, not only did Busick think he knew everything, but he was a problem drinker. Sure, I admit that I loved my beer, but I knew when and where to draw the line. Beer or booze wasn't important enough to screw up my spot. Busick would drink until five o'clock in the morning, then drag his ass to the airport for a seven o'clock flight. He would fall asleep in the gate area and I had to wake him up in time to make the flight. I got sick and tired of it. I drank a lot at night, but it never kept me from showing up when I was supposed to, and it never affected my work in the ring. If he couldn't do what he was expected to do, then he shouldn't have been drinking.

It all came to a head one morning when we were supposed to take a flight from Boston to Scranton. I let him sleep, and he missed the flight. Everybody — Bret Hart, Koko B. Ware, I.R.S., Jim Neidhart, and Rick Steamboat — everybody told me that I did the right thing. The guy had to learn. They all knew his work sucked, and everybody hated being booked against him because they knew they would have a lousy match, regardless of how hard they worked. Not only was he a lousy worker, but nine times out of 10, he was hungover. The only person who gave me a hard time about letting Busick sleep through his flight was George Steele. I've become friends with George over the years, but George gave me a bunch of crap about Busick being my "meal ticket," and how it was my duty to take care of him, and how I did wrong by not seeing to it that he made his flight. Attention, George! Attention, George! I wasn't really Busick's manager. The wrestling business is make-believe, just like Mr. Rogers' neighborhood. I was no more Bully's manager than I was an astronaut. He wasn't my meal ticket,

either. Vince McMahon was my meal ticket. Bully Busick was just a terrible worker who, for television purposes, I had to pretend I cared about. Period. The managing gimmick is a work! It wasn't my duty to baby-sit a grown man who was too immature to take care of himself.

On October 1, 1991, in one of his final, less-than-stellar, performances with the WWF, Busick worked with Steve "Brooklyn Brawler" Lombardi on "Prime Time Live." Brawler, who had a good heel run against the Red Rooster [Terry Taylor], was the first guy to ever leave Gorilla Monsoon laying. As I said earlier, Brawler had the Rock's first match, and he was talented enough to have good matches with guys like Sid, Tugboat, Virgil, Paul Roma, Hillbilly Jim, and countless others. Brawler even managed to make the Ultimate Warrior look good, and that was no easy task. And yet, he couldn't pull a passable match out of Busick. Brawler wasn't a miracle worker, and that's what it would have taken to have a good match with Busick.

The match between Brawler and Busick was terrible. When Busick chased Brawler and me through the curtain (part of the ridiculously stupid finish that Chief Strongbow came up with, which only added salt to the wound), the Bully never came back through the curtain again. Not that night, not ever. Goodbye. Good riddance.

With Busick gone, I was to be "reassigned" to somebody else. By now, I was known as "Harvey Wippleman." "Wippleman" came from a misstatement by Gene Okerlund, and the name stuck. My new charge to "manage" was the Warlord [Terry Szopinski], who up to that time had been managed by Slick. By the way, Slick spent a lot of time telling everybody that he was Rufus R. Jones's son. For those of you who believe that, it's a lie. He made it up. I asked Rufus and he told me so.

Warlord and I got along great. I wish I could tell you that we had a long, money-making run, or a memorable high spot, but we didn't. It was a very

benign, uneventful run. On the program inserts which listed the matches, there was always an unadvertised match on the card listed as "another exciting match." Warlord was always one of the participants in "another exciting match." Of course, if a wrestler wasn't featured, his manager wasn't sent out on the road, and I hadn't been on the road with Busick, either. I found myself getting worried. Would the office ever put me with a guy who meant something?

To my delight, I moved up to the "next level," as they say, on January 22, 1992, at the TV in Lubbock, Texas. Lo and behold, the new top heel in the WWF, Sid Justice (as Sid was called at that time) had successfully lobbied Vince to let me be his manager. For all intents and purposes, I was as high up the food chain as a heel manager could get. I went out on the road every day and I was finally making "road" money.

Chapter 16
Hulk Hogan Bumps for Harvey

One of the highlights of my career took place on March 14, 1992. The tour actually made a stop at the Pyramid Arena in Memphis. Sid and Flair (with me in their corner) were working with Hogan and Roddy Piper. Hulk, being the great guy he was (and is), really took care of me. "This is your backyard, brother," he told me in the dressing room. "I'm gonna make you look like a million dollars!"

And he did. During the heat, Hogan rolled out of the ring near where I was standing, and commanded me to "come and get" him. Catching him "off-guard," I punched and kicked him a few times. The way he bumped and sold for me, you would have thought I was Evander Holyfield. This

was Hulk Hogan! I couldn't believe it. As he laid on the ringside floor, he told me to throw him back into the ring, and when I did, Sid and Flair attacked him. That goes to show you what a great guy Hogan is. Here I was, about nine miles from DeSoto County, with a lot of my friends in the audience, and he made me look like the toughest guy in town. I'll never forget it.

For me, that was the last day of the road trip. I thanked Hulk very much for what he did for me, then headed south on Highway 61 for the short trip home to Walls, where I now owned a modest trailer. Three days later, I was back on the road, beginning at the Coliseum in Oakland, California. Piper and Hogan chased me around the ring and bumped me around like a rag doll. After the first bump, Hulk whispered to me, "We're not in Memphis any more," then gave me a nice (working) shot to the head. That was fun. I never minded taking bumps, especially ones that didn't hurt me, and Hogan and Piper were as smooth a silk. The bumps that caused my physical problems

were the bumps I had taken all over the country during my pre-WWF years. However, even when I took a bad bump in the WWF, I didn't complain. My name is Bruno; not Rhyno. I was there to work, not to sit at home and suck money from the office.

Unfortunately, everything didn't work out as well as it should have. Sid and I were not in the same type of situation as we had been years before in the CWF, and our friendship suffered a lot due to that. It wasn't an easy time for me at all. The money was great, and the spotlight was hot, but the stress was almost unbearable. Sid and I have always been close, and today, as I write this, we are closer than ever, but during the period in which I managed him, we really fell apart. Ultimately, our friendship came to an end for more than two years. It was sad. Sid was on top of the world, and he gets all of the credit for pulling me right up beside him. But it was an ugly situation, because for some reason, Sid was in a very angry mood for his entire push, and I had to bear the brunt of his

rage. It wasn't easy, and it wasn't worth it, no matter what I was being paid.

Sid literally put me through hell. He would make me get up at six o'clock in the morning to go to the gym with him, where I would sit … and sit … and sit. I wouldn't have minded so much if Sid didn't constantly tell me how I embarrassed him with my way of dressing, my accent, my way of conducting myself, etc. Big Sid cut me down for everything I did at the ring, everything I said in the dressing room, and every time I sneezed. It was like the old CWF days magnified by fifty. He was really rough on me.

On the other hand, Sid was rough on himself. He got angrier and angrier with every day that went by. It was as if he was mad at the world. I didn't understand it. He was getting the push of his life. They were grooming him to be Hulk Hogan's opponent in the main event at WrestleMania VIII. He was making tremendous money. And yet, for some inexplicable reason, he wasn't

happy. And if you're a part of Sid's life, when Sid's not happy, nobody's happy.

At this time, Sid was known as Sid Justice. He had become a fan favorite and was involved in a program which resulted in him turning his back on Hulk Hogan, who was his tag team partner in a match with the team of Ric Flair and The Undertaker. Sid destroyed Brutus Beefcake's "barber shop" on TV and destroyed one jobber after another. With each win, he would place a Hulk Hogan bandana or t-shirt on his defeated opponent, just to taunt Hogan, who was scheduled to face Flair for the WWF title at WrestleMania VIII on April 5, 1992. As "Doctor" Harvey Wippleman, I would use a stethoscope to listen to the heartbeat of his opponent, then declare them "dead" and hang a "Call 911" sign around their necks. As they were being carried out, Sid would knock them off the stretcher.

Hogan eventually gave his title shot to Randy "Macho Man" Savage and agreed to face Sid at

WrestleMania. In the wrestling world, WrestleMania was the most high-profile match of the year, and Sid was featured against Hogan on the top of the card alongside the Flair-Macho match.

As the WrestleMania event grew nearer, Sid became angrier and more sullen. On the day of the show, Vince, Sid, Hogan, Pat Patterson, Papa Shango, Ultimate Warrior, and myself, all got together in Vince's office at the Hoosier Dome in Indianapolis to go over the details of the match. The match itself would be simple, with the events leading up to the finish, and the finish itself, to be the main points which had to come off properly. Basically, the finish boiled down to Hogan using his finishing move (the legdrop) on Sid. Before he could score the pinfall, I hit the ring and the referee disqualified Sid for my interference. Hogan then picked me up and threw me across the ring, only Sid was there to catch me. As Hogan stalked Sid and me, Papa Shango hit the ring and attack him. The three of us then put

the boots to Hogan, which was the returning Ultimate Warrior's cue to hit the ring and clean house. Everything worked out just as it was supposed to.

The match pushed Shango to the level where he and Sid could work with either Hogan or Warrior in the main events. I thought that would be a good scenario all around. Sid, however, had different ideas. I'll explain that in a bit.

After WrestleMania, we went on an overseas tour, which was my first trip to Europe. It was very interesting, in many ways. First of all, jet lag was something I never experienced during my drives from Memphis to Louisville. Jet lag brought on a whole new body function to my world. Amsterdam, Holland, was the first stop for the tour, and I felt like a zombie when we landed. Jet lag is an odd feeling, and the only cure is to sleep. Other than that, you just have to deal with it. The first day, I slept for a long time, waking up just 20 minutes before it was time to get

on the bus which would take us to the arena. When we arrived at the building, we ate the catered food, did our part on the show, then got back onto the bus and went back to the hotel, where we spent the night at the bar. That process repeated itself every day. Curt Hennig wrote a song about the European tour syndrome called, From the Bar Right to the Bus, and he was right on target.

Warlord worked with the unbelievably horrible Virgil for the entire tour, and if nothing else, at least we were on early, which allowed us to catch the first bus back to the hotel, instead of waiting all night for the second and final bus, which had to wait for Bret Hart to finish his inconsiderate, long-shower-taking, moisturizing, conditioning routine.

John Nord, who was wrestling as the Berzerker, was a great guy and a real man's man. As Ray Stevens used to say, he would wade through hell to fight a buzz saw. I really liked Nord and we spent a lot of time together. Putting aside the fact that he could put away beer like nobody else, he was the

most devout Christian I had ever met. He would never, under any circumstances, cheat on his wife. That impressed me to no end. I'm not sure there were that many females who wanted to be with a huge, crazy-eyed, bearded, Paul Bunyan-like, Neanderthal, anyway, but his heart was certainly in the right place.

Like Chief, Nord also had a very entertaining way with words, and I always enjoyed hearing the way he would turn a phrase. The first night we went to the bar together, Nord ordered three beers for me and three for himself. Before I could down my first stout foreign beer, he had two down the hatch. We were drinking strong European beer, too, not Coors Light from Colorado. "Pick up the pace!" he shouted at me. That was his favorite saying to anybody who wasn't drinking as fast as he was.

When a group of us went to a restaurant, Nord would usually be the last person to order. After guys like Crush, Sid, Warlord, and British Bulldog

ordered their grilled chicken or fish, baked potatoes with no butter or sour cream, diet soda, and salad with fat-free dressing, Nord would loudly request, "Bring me a piece of bread and a big cup of grease." That wasn't actually what Nord wanted. That was just his way of being as opposite as he could from the health food fanatics. Nord was also fond of telling people, "I haven't had a good night's sleep since 1975. Oh, I doze off now and then, but I wake up screaming!"

One of my favorite "Nord-isms" would take place when we checked into a hotel. Nord would jokingly (I think) tell the front desk clerk to "send up two cases of beer … and tell the maintenance man to remove the bed, because it just gets in the way." That, of course, was his reference to staying up all night drinking and carousing.

Nord was one of a kind. On our subsequent European tour, Nord didn't return to the States with the rest of the crew. He and Hawk (of the Legion of Doom) stayed in London for a few extra

days. Not having been with them, I can't comment on what went on, but I'm sure it involved liquor, beer, and any combination thereof. Nord, as I said, would never cheat on his wife, and Hawk wasn't a skirt-chaser, either, so I'm sure they remained behind to extend the beer bust we had been on.

Hawk was a great guy, too, but he was his own worst enemy. One particular incident took place years later when Hawk asked Steve Lombardi and me for a ride. Normally, we never allowed anybody else in our vehicle, but Hawk was stuck for a ride, and since he was a good guy, we gave him a lift. Almost immediately, Hawk began drinking and "medicating" himself. By the time we dropped him off at his hotel, he was staggering and slurring his words. That led to my first confrontation with Bruce Prichard. I know I've been doing a lot of teasing about Bruce Prichard throughout this book, and I promise to explain exactly why I seem to have a problem with him, but for now, I'll just explain his bone-headed way of handling this particular situation.

Hawk was inebriated. There was no question about it. The WWF/WWE has always frowned on their talent and employees getting drunk and/or stoned, particularly in public, and rightly so. On that particular evening, there were quite a few WWF people in that hotel, and, of course, when Hawk showed up in his drunken state, somebody immediately reported him to Talent Relations, which Bruce was heavily involved with at the time. When Bruce was told that Lombardi and I had given Hawk a ride that night, he called me at home and placed all the blame on me … for something that I had absolutely no control over. When Bruce asked why I let Hawk get into that condition, I replied that the hardest part was holding him down and pouring the alcohol down his throat. I added that the other hardest part was making sure Hawk didn't tell anyone about the gun I put to his head to make him take the pills. After getting the sarcasm out of my system, I tried to rationally explain that neither Steve Lombardi or I had been aware of the fact that we were expected to baby-sit a 40-year-old professional athlete who

was twice my size and eight years older than me.

After arguing for several minutes, it finally dawned on me that I would never be able to make Bruce understand that I didn't tilt Hawk's head back and forcibly put the pint of whiskey into his mouth. I just sighed and half-heartedly said, "Yes, Bruce," as I've done 5,000 or so times since, and apologized for something I didn't do. Bruce never gave Lombardi grief like he does me. I can only assume that Steve wouldn't put up with Bruce's crap. I honestly think Bruce got off on knowing that I was the only person who would put up with his bullsh–. Later on, I'll give you a primer on Bruce and the mental torture he put me through over the years. And, strangely enough, I'll explain how I still, despite all he's done, consider Bruce my friend.

The European tour went well, and I definitely expanded my horizons in a lot of ways. When I was making trips to towns like Goodwater, Alabama; Osawatomie, Kansas; Big Bone

(really!), Kentucky; and Sledge, Mississippi, I never dreamed that my schedule would one day consist of Berlin, Germany; Amsterdam, Holland; London, England; Brussels, Belgium; and Belfast, Northern Ireland. That was quite an experience. I saw legal, open-air marijuana shops in Holland; legal, window-front prostitution in Belgium; and the most feminine transvestites I have ever seen in Berlin. That could have been scary, but thankfully, since I have never been a whoremonger, I never faced the horror of discovering that the "girl" I was making moves on had a "vagina on a stick." No, my entertainment in Europe was a nightly beer bust in the hotel lounge with Nord, Rick Martel, and the Bushwhackers. Martel, a fantastic worker and an even better guy, was truly a great guy to be around. He is someone I have always been proud to call my friend. Rick was a French-Canadian athlete with class. Known to wrestling fans as "The Model," I looked at him like a "role model." Rick always dressed immaculately, was clean shaven, and kept himself in tremendous shape. He was a real credit to our business. The

funny thing is that Rick and Nord, who were complete opposites in personality, got along great.

A couple of interesting sidelights took place on the tour. Ted DiBiase's departure after three days in Europe was a point of interest. DiBiase, who is now a Christian and evangelist, was somehow continually embroiled in accusations and assumptions of marital infidelity. I hated that because I really respected Teddy a lot, both as a wrestler and as a person. I never saw him in a compromising position, and that's the truth, but regardless, Teddy had to fly home to Jackson, Mississippi (a fellow Mississippian!) to rectify his family life.

Steve Lombardi was flown in to take Teddy's place on the tour. Of all places, Steve's first match was in Belfast. Steve's arrival in London, where he was scheduled to make his connecting flight to Belfast, was a comical situation. I wasn't with Steve, naturally, but the story he told about his attempt to clear customs was priceless. Since

Steve was a last-minute replacement, he didn't have any paperwork or a visa, so, naturally, he couldn't admit that he was there to work. When the customs official examined his passport and his itinerary, she asked him, "What's your purpose for traveling to Belfast?"

With a straight face, he replied, "Vacation."

Vacation? In Belfast? What was his next stop? Beirut? Kabul? Nobody … NOBODY … vacations in Belfast. Belfast is a war zone, one of the most dangerous places in the entire world. Shootings, bombings, and random acts of violence are a way of life in Belfast, and yet, Steve Lombardi chose that place to vacation. Not Beverly Hills. Not Miami. Belfast! I can't tell you how or why, but they eventually accepted his story and sent him on his way to Belfast.

Belfast was definitely not a place for the faint of heart. Tanks and armored cars patrolled the streets. Uzi and machine-gun carrying soldiers

roamed carefully on both sides of the streets. Sandbags were set up liberally throughout the city, piled up high, with machine gunners perched precariously behind them, with their fingers on the triggers. Bombed-out buildings were an acceptable way of life, as was fear. And here we were, ready to jump around like monkeys for the citizens of Belfast. I guess watching our show took their minds off the constant threat of sudden death for the short time we were there.

The next day, as we rode the bus from Belfast to Glasgow, Scotland, we were stopped by a tank! Try to visualize that situation. At one time or another in our lives, we have all had the occasion to be stopped by the police, whether it was for speeding, a broken taillight, expired tags, or in my case, several DWI infractions. It's never a good feeling to see blue lights flashing in your rear view mirror. Well, imagine a tank blocking the roadway, and two soldiers with sub-machine guns boarding the bus! That makes Officer Doolittle of the Sheboygan PD stopping you seem

like a walk in the park.

As the soldiers made their way down the aisle, everybody on the bus was silent. All the heels of the WWF were on the bus (the babyfaces had a separate bus). The soldiers walked silently up the aisle of the bus, looking at everyone and everything as they maneuvered their way up the aisle. They both kept their fingers on the trigger of their machine guns the entire time, which was unnerving. Even the usually loud, boisterous Nord sat in stony silence. We didn't have the foggiest idea of who those guys were. Were they the local police? Were they IRA? Were they soldiers? The only thing we knew for certain was that they could have mowed us down right then and there, and there wasn't a thing any of us could have done about it, except bleed to death on the floor. Thank God, they didn't open fire. Without ever saying so much as one word, they got off the bus, moved the tank, and motioned for the driver to proceed. Off we went on our not-so-merry way. At that point, you couldn't have poked a matchstick up my

rectum, if you get my drift.

To say the least, I was happy to leave Northern Ireland. It reminded me too much of Starkville, Mississippi. As we passed the border into the United Kingdom, the bus stopped at what was similar to a U.S. truckstop, and we all went inside to get a meal and a break from the tedious bus trip. The food wasn't exactly top notch. One of the items on the menu was "pickle and mustard sandwich." "Mm, my favorite," Mike Rotunda said sarcastically. When the bus driver joined us for our "hearty" lunch, we asked him about the impromptu search of the bus. He explained that the soldiers were actually protecting us. They stopped us because they wanted to make sure we hadn't been hijacked or commandeered, or at the very least, infiltrated by members of the IRA. When they saw we weren't, they let us continue on our journey. "No big deal," said the driver.

Yeah, no big deal.

In Dublin, Willie Nelson and Kris Kristofferson were staying at the same hotel we were, which was cool. It was also cool, by the way, to be out of Belfast's Europa hotel, the most bombed hotel in history. It was pretty neat to meet Willie, and he proved to be a really nice guy. Somebody must have peed in Kristofferson's coffee that morning because he was grumpy. He walked past us without a word and didn't bother to acknowledge the fact that there were other Americans in the hotel. That was his loss, though. He'll probably never know that he missed what might be his one opportunity to meet the great Harvey Wippleman. Tatanka, our Indian-gimmick babyface, told Willie that his dad was a huge Willie Nelson fan. Willie actually removed his headband, signed it, and gave it to Tatanka as a present for his dad. I thought that was a very classy thing to do. I have a lot of respect for Willie for the kindness he showed to all of us.

When the tour was over, we took the long, tedious flight back to New York, and then everybody

splintered off to our home airports; Nord to Minneapolis, Sid (still) to Atlanta, Martel to Quebec City, the Bushwhackers to Tampa, me to Memphis, and everybody else to wherever they lived. We had five days off before we had to start work, and the time off was definitely well deserved. During our hiatus, I learned that Warlord got his notice. Warlord bitched, moaned, and complained about every little thing that happened while we were overseas. Of course, each time he did, the road agents fell all over each other in their attempts to be the first to snitch to the office. I'm not surprised that Warlord had a bit of heat when he got back to the States. To add to his problems, Warlord kept bragging that the "American Gladiators" show wanted him to join their troupe, and it wasn't much of a surprise when Chief asked him to pull a "Hank Snow." For you youngsters, Hank Snow was a longtime country-music legend whose biggest hit (1950) was I'm Movin' On.

Five days after we returned to the United States,

Sid and I were booked on a 10-day run through the northeast. Sid was scheduled to wrestle Ultimate Warrior for the entire tour. The traffic jams, congestion, high prices, and general chaos of the northeast are enough to put anybody in a bad mood, and evidently, sent Sid over the edge. I don't have any other explanation for his irrational behavior.

Sid's first match with Warrior took place in Baltimore. To say the match sucked is probably giving Sid and Warrior more credit than they deserve. Truthfully, the fact that they had a bad match wasn't Sid's fault. Warrior was the type of guy who made a great entrance. Entering the arena to the sound of loud music, a colorful outfit, and face paint, he would bark at the ceiling and shake the ropes. Sadly, however, when the music stopped, so did his charisma. Warrior had a "main-event body and a squash-job brain," which was an expression my friend Steve Lombardi made up. Steve wasn't talking about Warrior when he used that phrase, but I thought it was appropriate, so I'll use it for this particular story. Anyway, to

put it bluntly, Sid wasn't exactly satisfied with the match. I knew he was upset about it, but he refused to talk about it.

The next night, at the old Boston Garden arena, Sid went ballistic in the dressing room after his match. I knew how tough it was to work with Warrior, but I just couldn't understand why he was making such a big deal out of it. He kicked a chair, threw his boots across the room, and scowled. He practically hyperventilated as he changed back into his street-clothes. When George Steele, the agent for that show, tried to approach him, Sid just said "George, tell Vince I quit and I'm going home. Now get the fu– away from me NOW!" He was livid, and his actions were frightening to watch.

When it came to scaring me, his actions took a back seat to what he had to say after we left the arena. "Bruno, you're going to finish up, too. We're going to the airport and you're going to fly back to Memphis with me." Sid ranted and

raved irrationally all the way to Logan International Airport. He talked about how terrible things were in the WWF, and how ridiculous it was for him to be working with Warrior. He went on and on. Once again, just like all the times in CWF, I was there to bear the brunt of his anger. I begged Sid to reconsider. As we stood in front of the airline ticket counter, I suggested he go explain his grievances to Vince on the following day at Niagara Falls TV. "Whatever the problem," I assured him, "Vince will fix things for you." Sid would hear none of it. He simply told me to get my credit card and buy a one-way ticket to Memphis, or he would "snap my fu–ing neck." Not wanting my neck snapped, I pulled out my trusty Visa and slapped it on the Northwest ticket counter, and without so much as telling a soul from the company, I pulled a Hank Snow with Sid.

When we landed in Memphis, Sid got into his car and drove home to Arkansas, while I hopped into my truck and drove to Mississippi. As we parted,

Sid told me, "Tomorrow, call Vince and thank him for everything, but tell him that you want to finish up, then call Lawler and go back to the USWA. As soon as I get out of my WWF contract, I'll take you to WCW with me."

None of those options were very appealing to me. I didn't want to go back to the USWA. I loved it there, but I loved the WWF, too, and I was making really good money. Vince McMahon had given me the opportunity to save money and make something of my life. As far as WCW goes, I had absolutely no interest in working for them. It just wasn't something I wanted out of life.

As I entered my little trailer house on the outskirts of Walls, Mississippi, my telephone was ringing. I was in the midst of a serious crisis, and I was in no mood to listen to any bullsh–. I just wanted to call the office the next morning and discuss the situation with Vince. At the time, I didn't know Vince on a very personal level, so I didn't have his home number. Thankfully, I didn't have to wait for the

next morning to call Vince. When I answered the phone, I was pleased to hear the voice of my old friend and USWA promoter, Buddy Wayne. He sounded panicky. "Bruno, what the hell are you doing at home?"

After telling him what had happened, he said, "Bruno, use your head and buy an answering machine. Vince McMahon has been trying to call you for hours. Since he didn't have a way to leave a message, he called me, and asked me to have you call him at once." Buddy gave me Vince's home phone number and told me to call him.

Nervously, I called Vince, preparing for the worst. As I have come to expect from Vince, I was pleasantly surprised. He didn't bitch at me. He simply asked me what happened, and I told him, in unflinching detail. After sitting quietly and hearing me out, he asked me two simple questions. "Bruno, do you work for Sid or me?"

"I work for you."

"Do you want to continue being booked by the WWF?"

"Yes, I do," I stammered.

"If that's the case, then I'm glad to hear it. You're welcome to come back and stay for as long as you want. I want you to call J.J. Dillon and arrange for a plane ticket to Buffalo Niagara International Airport, and your return to Memphis three days later, after the Rochester, Niagara Falls, and Syracuse TV tapings."

I showered, shaved, changed clothes, and drove right back to the airport. The whole time I was getting ready to leave, the phone rang continuously. I ignored it, afraid that it might be Sid. I don't know if I was justified in my thinking or not, but I really felt that if I crossed Sid, he would kill me, or at the very least, snap my neck. I didn't want to die, so I took the coward's way out and let the phone ring. At that particular moment in time, I was glad that I didn't own an answering

machine.

When I arrived at the Buffalo Niagara Airport, I was met by John D'Amico, who the Chief called "John Brown." John told me that Vince personally sent him to get me, to make sure I made it to the arena. Sadly, I had completely maxed out my small-limit credit card, the only one I had at that time, so I wasn't able to rent a car. My plan was to take a cab to the arena. I had explained that to J.J., who evidently told Vince, and who, in turn, sent John Brown to pick me up. Now before you label me as a goof who maxed out my credit card because I was financially irresponsible, let me speak (or write) in my defense: As I do to this day, I have always kept my credit cards at zero balance. I pay my bill(s) in full each and every month. So, no, I didn't max out my card on stupid purchases like video games or lap dances. I maxed it out when I bought a full-fare, no-advance-purchase, plane ticket from Boston to Memphis at Sid's demand! Thank you.

John dropped me off outside the arena on the afternoon of April 28, 1992, and I walked inside. Everybody was buzzing about Sid's abrupt departure and immediately started to pepper me with questions about why he left. I told them the truth. I honestly didn't know! To this day, I don't know the reason. The only thing I knew about the incident for sure were the reasons I returned. Other than the money, part of my reasoning had to do with Vince McMahon. I have always been a good judge of character, and even though I had only known Vince for the better part of a year, I had a good feeling about him. I could tell that he wasn't a bull-shifter, and to this day, I firmly stand by that assessment. I also knew that the WWF was where I wanted to be, and that it would be a secure spot for me. When Vince told me that I would always have a place in the WWF, I believed him. He has told me that several other times over the years, and he has kept his word. Not only that, but he never held my head down between my legs until I passed out, so that's in his favor.

Vince called me into his TV office and shook my hand. He thanked me for coming back, and assured me that I had made the right decision. He told me that I should talk with Jack Lanza, who would lay out my new scenario. We shook hands again and I was back in business.

Chapter 17
Catching a Tumor

In just a little more than six months, I was going to be put with my fourth guy. When I walked out of Vince's office, Curt "Mr. Perfect" Hennig said, in his typical humorous fashion, "I hope they don't put you with me." He always teased me about the "Wippleman Jinx." Every guy I was put with ended up leaving the WWF, and apparently, Curt wasn't ready to leave the company.

No, it wasn't Curt they put me with. It was fellow Mississippian (or Ugandan, depending on how you look at it), the mighty Kamala. Kamala [real name James Harris], Steve Lombardi (who wore a mask and safari outfit as Kim Chee, Kamala's handler), and I became the newest heel trio in the WWF. For more than a year, the three of us were joined at the hip. We traveled together, roomed together, ate together, and worked

together, for 10 days on, three days off, three days on, three days off, over and over again. That was our life.

It's hard to explain life with James [Harris]. He constantly bitched and moaned about racism and prejudice, but he was the most racist, prejudiced person I had ever met. It was hard for me to accept somebody with that kind of an attitude, but, since we were in business together, and I otherwise liked him, I just listened and overlooked his ranting. James always wanted things done his way, and as long as he got his way, he was happy. Steve and I did our best to keep the big baby happy because we knew that James wasn't above walking out and going home. That was his style.

We split our expenses three ways. In the hotel rooms, James and Steve took the beds, and, since I was the smallest, I got the rollaway cot, or, if none was available, I slept on the floor. I didn't mind. Steve and I saved as much money as we

could, while James bought trucks, cars, dogs, guns, 4-wheelers, radios, etc. In a last-ditch effort to save some money, he decided to forgo paying his taxes. That was his way of thinking. James was a demanding guy, and he wasn't shy about letting us know that we were lucky to be with him, and that HE was the "money" in our group, and that if he left, we would be in trouble. Well, Steve and I both knew that if James left, Steve could continue to work as the Brooklyn Brawler, and I could simply manage someone else, but to keep the peace, and because the money was good, we gave James his way. He wasn't a "no-good bastard" or anything like that. He was just a spoiled brat (if you can call a 350-pound guy, with most of the weight in his massive belly, a brat).

The three of us were in the main events, but we were the "B" town main-events, usually against Ultimate Warrior, Bret Hart, or the Undertaker. James's matches with Warrior were actually not bad. I still can't credit Warrior with a match that would be considered "okay," but I'll

give him a "not bad" rating on occasion. Even with Warrior's limitations, their matches came off as "not bad." James owed a lot of his matches to Kim Chee (Lombardi). Kim Chee wore a mask, so the people couldn't see him calling the spots (practically every spot) every night to Kamala, since James had a knack for forgetting all of the spots every night. That's not an exaggeration. He would forget every spot. I don't think Kamala's run would have lasted long if it hadn't been for Steve. I'll take some of the credit, too, but in a different manner. As Steve kept up with the in-ring action, I kept up with James's shoes, necklace, spear, and wooden Kamala head-piece, all of which would have disappeared after the first day if Kamala had to bear responsibility for his own ring gear. So our basic job descriptions were: Kamala wrestled, Steve made sure the match went right, and I took care of the details. It seemed to work well for us.

The racial garbage that James constantly rattled on about wore me out, though. As I said

previously, racism in any form sucks, but with James, everything was a black and white issue. If I called somebody "colored," James's response was, "What color was
he? Purple? Green? Blue?" If I said something to the effect of, "that black guy over there said we could park in Lot B," James would say, "Why do you have to say the black guy? Why not the tall guy? Why not the guy in the blue shirt?" It was always something like that. I couldn't win. That made life on the road a lot harder for us. Life was twice as hard for Lombardi, because not only did he do the Kim Chee gimmick every night, he also wrestled frequently as the Brawler. He did double duty and was paid single money. Pat Patterson, who was, and still is, our good friend, was the payoff guy at the time, but he didn't do Steve any special favors, that's for sure. I just managed, while Steve had to change clothes twice, manage, remember all of James's spots, in addition to his own, wrestle, shower, and move on to the next town — and we got paid identically. I'll be the first to admit that it wasn't fair, but such is life.

In addition to his program with Ultimate Warrior, Kamala also worked a semi-main event program with Undertaker. "Taker" beat Kamala in all kinds of matches, including Casket matches and Rest In Peace matches. One of their matches took place on August 29, 1992, in Wembley Stadium in London, England, in front of 80,355 fans. The atmosphere in that stadium was awesome. It's hard to describe the aura, but suffice it to say that it was almost breathtaking. The match was very good, with the Undertaker getting the win by disqualification, which was how it should have been. The Deadman was, and is, a truly deserving star in our business.

By the time we returned to the United States, the Kamala gimmick was getting a little stale, and the office began to discuss plans to switch Kamala babyface. I was concerned because I knew I would need another (my 5th) guy to manage, and I didn't yet know who that would be. I also had a strong feeling that Kamala would never get over as a babyface, and I was correct in my

assumptions. The angle never really got over, even though it seemed to be a good idea at the time. On December 14, 1992, at Green Bay TV, we began a slow buildup. A few weeks later, they shot a minor angle with Kamala versus Kim Chee, who, technically, was my 5th "managee." James beat Steve all around the "loop," and that was the end of that. Slick, the no-good, hypocritical, two-faced, ass-wipe, was brought in to be James's babyface manager, which was like putting fuel to James's racist fire. Slick thought everybody black was being discriminated against, and James would echo every statement that came out of Slick's mouth. That struck me as being extremely funny, since James was paid at least five times what I was, and I'm as white as a sheet. Slick didn't do as well as I did in the business, but it wasn't because of his color of his skin. It was because he was the sh–s … especially as a babyface. Slick never understood that a manager is the parsley on the plate, not the main course. When you talk to get yourself over, it doesn't get you OR your guy over. Of course, Slick probably figured that out

when he and Kamala were both let go by the company. Slick occasionally shows up when we're in the Dallas-Fort Worth area where he lives, and he still cries the blues about not having any money. He really shouldn't waste his time because none of us really care. Kamala wasn't a piece of dung like Slick, but his racist rationale for everything that ever went wrong in his life was absolutely ridiculous. I couldn't wait to move on to number five (or six). I just prayed it wouldn't be another Malcolm X.

In 1994, six months after Kamala left the WWF, Vince booked him to appear at the Royal Rumble in Providence, Rhode Island. The Royal Rumble was the first pay-per-view of the year and it was always a great payday. James was being flown into Providence Airport, about 15 miles from the Civic Center. When he arrived, he called Steve and me to see if we could pick him up. We were driving in from Boston, so, due to time and location constraints, we couldn't pick him up. We told him to take a cab and we would see to it that

he was reimbursed for the expense. He decided he wasn't going to do that, so he just didn't show up. As usual, Virgil was hanging around, so they let him take Kamala's spot. Virgil was also black, which was good, because that would prevent James from claiming his non-appearance was racially motivated. James later made the statement that he didn't show up because the office didn't give him a pre-arranged ride, even though a few weeks later, he told Lombardi and me that he stayed home because his wife "caught a tumor." Disregard the fact that you don't catch tumors, or that he tried to play us for idiots. James had lost countless casket matches to the Undertaker, and now he had put the nail in the coffin of his career.

In subsequent years, Kamala has gone on record with kayfabe sheet writers, Internet reporters, and radio shows, about racism in the WWF. Those statements really strike me as being a bit odd. When he made those statements, the Rock, who is half black and half Samoan, was arguably

the most successful (or at least tied with Hogan) WWF superstar of all time. Booker T was a multiple title holder who was always featured on top, or at least close to the top. Ron Simmons was used as an ass-kicking, take-no-prisoners, tough guy. Maven, Shelton Benjamin, Jacqueline, Jazz, Linda Miles, Devon Dudley, Godfather, Mark Henry, and Teddy Long were all on the 2002 WWE roster, and they were making a lot more money than me, but I wasn't bitching about racism. They're making more than me because, even though I worked hard and deserved every dime I got, I wasn't in a money-drawing situation. That's why I wasn't paid as much. Period. Race doesn't have a thing to do with what Kamala made, or the downturn in the direction his career. I was envious about the white folks who made more than me, too, but since I'm grateful for what I have, I've accepted my lot in life. In fact, I'm so grateful for the spot I have today as the WWE's head "concierge," I can hardly contain my gratitude. But back in the early '90s, I was still a manager, and hearing Kamala's racist

crap sickened me. Had James forgotten about Rocky Johnson, Tony Atlas, Koko B. Ware, George Wells, S.D. Jones, Virgil, and others who also made more money than a lot of white guys? Wake up and smell the coffee, James!

Another incident happened at the Green Bay TV, where we began Kamala's babyface turn. Kim Chee's run was limited, because without Kamala, there really was no reason for Kim Chee. Once again, I had nobody to manage, so I needed to have a chat with Vince, in the hopes of learning what he had planned for me. I sat on a folding chair outside of Vince's TV office, awaiting my turn to converse with the "emperor." Ahead of me in line was Crush [Brian Adams] and Nailz [Kevin Wacholz]. Nailz, who was doing an ex-con gimmick, was a huge, mean-looking guy from Minnesota. He had a reputation as a street fighter and had won a tough-man contest before becoming a pro wrestler.

Crush was the first to answer Vince's summons,

and he came out after spending about five minutes with Vince. Knowing Crush, he was probably telling Vince that he thought people should sell for him like he was radioactive, take big bumps at the mention of his name, and fall over dead at the slightest physical contact. I liked Crush, but he had a very high opinion of himself. He was as strong as an ox, but he couldn't work, and that's where his biggest problem lay. He thought he could work. He was wrong.

Nailz was next in line, and in what I thought was a nice gesture, he told me to go ahead of him and talk to Vince first. I thanked him and went on into the room. Vince actually invited me to sit down and asked me what was on my mind. I told him the story about how, once again, I was up against the wall with nobody to manage. Vince laughed and told me that I didn't have anything to worry about, because Jorge González, the former El Gigante from WCW, was coming in as a major heel, and I was going to be his manager. Vince also wondered why Bruce Prichard hadn't told me

already, to which I replied I didn't know. I suppose it slipped Bruce's mind. I'm sure it wasn't the fact that he couldn't stand the idea of giving me any news that he thought would make me happy. Nah. Couldn't be. Anyway, I was elated.

Vince told me that either J.J. or Bruce would give me all the details about when Jorge would be starting, and so forth. I shook hands with Vince and left the room. As I walked out, big Nailz went in for his pow-pow. I met Steve Lombardi in the hallway and excitedly told him about my new situation. He was very glad for me, just as I was glad that he was booked solid, on every house show and every TV, working in warm-up matches with guys like Jim Brunzell, Jim Powers, and Reno Riggins. We were both going to be okay without the "big racial fella'."

Suddenly, we heard a loud commotion coming from Vince's room. It was Nailz, screaming and ranting at Vince like a maniac! He was complaining about his Wembley payoff, the show

on which he worked one of the opening matches with the dreadful Virgil. I don't know what his payoff was, but I could hear him loudly demanding that Vince put $100,000 dollars in his bank account, and Vince calmly refusing. As that went on for what seemed like several minutes, a nervous and curious crowd gathered in the hallway to hear the rumpus. Lombardi, the Steiner brothers (who were there that day for their WWF debut), Tony Garea, Rene Goulet, the Beverly brothers, John Nord, Marty Jannetty, and I were all right there when we heard a loud crash. Garea and Goulet ran into the room at that point to see what had happened. Amid all the confusion and chaos of everybody running into the room to break up the argument, I couldn't really see exactly what transpired, but one of the agents later told me that when they burst into the room, Nailz was on top of McMahon with his hands around his throat. The agents grabbed Vince and the Minnesota boys grabbed Nailz. "Get off me. I'm fine," Vince said to the agents, as Nord and one of the Beverly Brothers took Nailz out of the building. Did Nailz

get his $100,000? No. Did he deserve it? Double no. Did Vince sell for him or back down? No. I still don't know what possessed Nailz to do that. He was a big, average, limited worker, who was lucky to even be in the WWF. His gimmick was actually getting a pretty good amount of heat, and he had a decent run in a program with the Big Bossman, so he should have been satisfied.

I'll never understand some people, especially the Minnesota boys. What an odd bunch they were. Curt Hennig, a real character himself, was a ringleader among them. Everything was funny to Curt. Everything was a joke, and ribs were always on his mind. And to be truthful, it got old … fast. Everything didn't have to be funny, and every locker room didn't have to be ribbed. One night in Kalamazoo, Curt took the dead baby mice that the snake-trainer used to feed Jake Robert's snake, and put them everywhere. Curt put them in people's bags, their shoes, their pockets, the inside of their sock, the insides of their hats. You name it. If something in the locker room was unattended, the

chances were good that it contained a dead baby mouse. Later that night, when I prepared to brush my teeth at the hotel, I found one in my bathroom bag. At one-thirty in the morning, I didn't find that to be funny. Of course, Curt laughed himself right out of a job with the WWE in 2002, so, to coin a phrase, I don't think Curt got the last laugh.

Sadly, Curt was found dead in a Tampa, Florida hotel room on February 10, 2003. He was only 44 years old. The Tampa coroner and medical examiner's office said he died from acute cocaine intoxication. His father, legendary wrestler Larry Hennig, said a lethal combination of steroids and painkillers contributed to his death. He was a great talent who died much too young.

To get back to the time frame at hand: Nailz was history, and I was moving forward, anxious to get started on my run with Jorge González, the man who would be known as Giant González. J.J. explained to me that I would be more than just a manager for González. I would also be his

"caretaker," which was another word for "babysitter." I never babysat an 8-foot-tall, 480-pound man before. JJ explained that Jorge was only semi-fluent in English, and was very sensitive to the attention his size gathered him in public. As I'll explain, "babysitting" Jorge took some getting used to, but I really enjoyed my time with him, and we remain friends to this day.

We first met at the 1993 Royal Rumble in Sacramento at the Arco Arena, the home of Sacramento Kings. González was a sight to see. He was legitimately eight feet tall, and his hands were bigger than the average person's head. His head, however, was bigger than the average television set was in those days. Jorge was very cordial and happy to meet me. He had been told all about me, and had been told by Steve Lombardi that I would be driving him around and getting him checked into hotels. A few weeks before Jorge's debut, Steve had been assigned to help him learn how to work in the ring at the office. I was also responsible for making sure we

always had a Cadillac (the only car he could comfortably ride in), and bringing him his meals, so he didn't have to go out in public, where he was stared at as if he was a carnival sideshow attraction. I didn't mind this new task at all, and I was happy and eager to get started. The only negative connotation to this new arrangement was that I would no longer be able to travel with Lombardi. We had become used to traveling together, but we understood that Jorge didn't want anybody else in the car, and in a manner of speaking, he was the "boss." While I traveled with the Giant, Steve traveled with Damien Demento, Bob Backlund, and/or Nikolai Volkoff.

Almost immediately, they shot an angle and put González into an upper-level program with the Undertaker. I was happy to be involved in a serious angle again, and happily, Jorge and I got along wonderfully. He was very demanding and finicky, but he wasn't a jerk about it, so I happily endured whatever he asked. He sometimes betrayed his naiveté, not only to the business, but

to life, by asking me to do absurd things, like lace and unlace his boots in the dressing room (in front of everybody), shave his back (again, in front of everybody), or bring him tubs of warm water laced with Epsom Salt in the dressing room, in which he could soak his massive feet. If he was a jerk, or if he did it just to make me look like an idiot, I would have told him to screw himself, but that wasn't the case. He was told that I was there to take care of him, and that's what he expected me to do. The sight of me unlacing his boots soon became so common that nobody blinked an eye.

At times, he would disrupt my life; unintentionally, of course. Most of the time, his requests had something to do with the fact that he was a serious diabetic. On several occasions, at two or three o'clock in the morning, Jorge would call my room and tell me that he was in danger of a seizure because his sugar was way down. The treatment was seven or eight turkey sandwiches and a liter of Diet Coke. I would get up, albeit reluctantly, and leave the hotel to find an open

restaurant that could suit his requests. Jorge lived on turkey sandwiches, Diet Coke, and Marlboro Lights.

Unfortunately, as I'm sure the Undertaker will attest, Jorge's work wasn't very good. He was also lazy in the ring, which I could tell was very frustrating for "Taker," who has always been a hard worker, and who always took pride in having good matches. Jorge's talent was extremely limited, due to both his size and lack of ability, so having a good match with him wasn't even a possibility. His knees were also shot, so his matches had to be very basic, and very, very slow-paced. Randy Savage, Undertaker, Tito Santana, and Owen Hart — all good workers — had a tough time in their attempts to have decent matches with González. However, due to his impressive size and look, business was good. He was a drawing card at least once per venue, so he stayed around for a while.

Jorge's size even got him acting gigs, with bit

parts on the TV shows Baywatch and Thunder in Paradise, and the TV movie Hercules in the Underworld. Jorge's notoriety also got the two of us booked live on the highly-rated Live with Regis and Kathie Lee show. I loved it! We flew to New York on the day before the show, which was to be shot live the following morning. The series of events that led up to our appearance on the show was a comedy of errors from the start. First of all, the car that the Regis people were supposed to send for us never arrived, and since Jorge couldn't fit into a cab, Jorge, Fonzie [a rat-faced, sneaky-looking referee], and I had to walk about 14 blocks to the TV studio. Can you imagine the looks we got — or should I say, the looks that Jorge got — as we made our way through the bustling crowds in Manhattan? An 8-foot tall giant is a real traffic stopper, even to Manhattanites, who have seen it all.

When we finally arrived at the building, we couldn't figure out where to go, and since nobody in New York speaks English, we had a tough time

locating the studio. Somehow, we managed to get where we were supposed to be. If we expected a big welcome and the star treatment, we were certainly in for a big letdown. Robert Urich had the star dressing room, while Jorge, Fonzie, and I shared a closet-sized room with a group of jugglers. When Jorge asked for a Diet Coke, the flighty and not-so-friendly people, who weren't actually very attentive to us at all, informed us that only Robert Urich had drinks in his room. What a bunch of jerks! I asked Fonzie to go to the store and buy Jorge a 6-pack of Diet Cokes and some yogurt. He went, if somewhat reluctantly, but only after asking me why I didn't go. "Sh–, Fonzie! We have to do a live TV show. I can't just disappear!" After Robert Urich had his segment, and the jugglers did their thing, it was our turn. To me, this was the big time. After all the years of suffering and struggling, I was going to appear on television with Regis and Kathie Lee. Sure, our appearance was really about González, not me, but I was enjoying the moment for all it was worth.

We weren't given an opportunity to meet either Regis or Miss Gifford beforehand, so we simply winged it. Vince, of course, had briefed us about what he wanted us to do. He wanted González to be a babyface. "Just talk nicely and respectfully to the hosts, and make a good impression." His primary concern was for me to plug Giant González' upcoming match with Undertaker. "Bruno, I want you to act like a real jerk. Knock New York, knock the hosts, and just be a heel." And that's exactly what I did. After Jorge had his baby face dialogue, it was my turn. I managed to say and do everything that Vince had asked, as well as slide in a few plugs for Walls, Mississippi. I knocked New York so badly that Kathie Lee playfully threatened to punch me out and chased me around the set.

At the end of our segment, Regis shook my hand and Kathie Lee hugged us. We left immediately and, once again, walked the 14 blocks to our hotel. I didn't complain. I would have walked several miles to be on that show, and I wouldn't

have missed that experience for the world.

The next time I got home to Walls, I was treated like a god. The townspeople had never heard anybody mention Walls, Mississippi, on national television, and it made me a local hero in my hometown. "Welcome home, Bruno" was displayed on the electric sign outside Loretta's, the local beer joint and gathering place in Walls. Jerry Lawler, probably the best cartoon artist in Memphis, had sketched a huge portrait/caricature of me for the owners of Loretta's, and they had placed it on the wall next to the "Downtown Bruno" portrait. My money was no good anywhere in Walls that night — or for that matter, for the six days that I was home. Whenever I tried to buy a beer, a sandwich, a bag of potato chips, a plate of catfish and okra, or whatever, I got the same response: "Your money's no good here, Bruno." The people in the town gave me whatever I wanted for free. I heard so many people tell me my money was no good that I actually started to think something was actually

wrong with it. DeSoto County, in general, and Walls, in particular, had a new hero, and I loved every minute of it.

González was the sixth guy I had managed, and he had certainly gained me more exposure and notoriety than anyone I had managed to that date. Two weeks after "Downtown Bruno Week" in Walls, González was booked to work with the Undertaker at the Pyramid, the huge arena in downtown Memphis. Thanks to González being a good friend and a good sport, I gave Loretta's Beer Joint and the village of Walls, Mississippi, a surprise that people still talk about to this day. Jorge came to Walls with me after the show. When we walked into Loretta's, we caused the biggest uproar in Walls since … well, I guess it was the only uproar ever to take place in Walls. The people went berserk when the 8-foot-tall Argentinean ducked through the 6-foot, 8-inch doorway, and walked towards the bar. People stopped whatever they were doing and just stared. I considered it an honor that Jorge would

go against his normal procedure and actually make a public appearance. He hated being the center of attention, but he did it to make me look good in my hometown. He was a true friend.

After a few months on the road, González became increasingly grumpy and disgruntled. I'm sure much of his attitude was due to the fact that he wasn't in good health. He was a severe diabetic and could barely walk. He was also out of shape because he was too lazy to work out, so the office made him wear a skin-tight outfit that was air-brushed with a muscle motif. Ostensibly, the outfit made him look muscular, but after a while, it just seemed to hang off of him. It was a sad sight. I knew that it was just a matter of time before he would be gone, either by his own volition or because the office released him, and I found myself wondering who "number seven" would be.

Summer Slam, which took place at the palace of Auburn Hills in central Michigan that year, was the beginning of the end. The event was to be the final

confrontation between González and the Undertaker, and the finish was a doozy. It involved me in a big way, as did the afterbirth [the action that takes place after a match]. After Paul Bearer clotheslined me on the ringside floor, and took back the Undertaker's urn that I had "stolen" earlier, he threw it to the Deadman, who cold-cocked my lanky Giant and covered him for the win. The people exploded when the referee counted 1-2-3. After celebrating their victory, the Undertaker and Paul Bearer left the ring. As I sold the Pooh-Bear clothesline, big Jorge shook off the urn's blow and (in a working manner, of course) started to berate and yell at me for letting the "enemies" regain their urn. Following the instructions I had been given before the match by the road agent, I began to yell back at González and argue with him. He didn't take kindly to that, so he grabbed me, lifted me into the air, and choke-slammed me to the mat.

In my 29 years in the business, that was the first time I had ever been knocked unconscious in the

ring. Let me tell you: nothing compares to González' choke slam. Even Bradshaw's "working" clothesline, which he calls the "clothesline from hell," pales in comparison to González' choke slam. When Sid put my head between my knees, it was more of a suffocation move, not a knockout. So, Jorge's choke slam was a brand new form of suffering for me, and it was scary. As I laid prone on the hard ring, and slowly regained consciousness, the first coherent memory I have is of (agent) Rene Goulet showing his concern for my plight, as he "compassionately" yelled in his French-Canadian accent, "Bruno! This is a pay-per-view! Get the fu– out of the ring!"

I didn't mind him saying that, and I did exactly what he said. I got the fu– out of the ring, because that was business! At the same time, a goof named Bob Clarke, and a guy named Chris Brannon, practically had seizures whenever one of the guys broke a fingernail. That's absurd. Wrestling, be it sports entertainment or not, is not a business for

pussies, but they're trying to make it one. In my opinion, if a guy can't take a little pain, then he needs to go home and get a good job.

I went directly to my hotel room and went to sleep. I didn't know if I had a concussion, but I really didn't care. I was sleepy, so I went to sleep. When I woke up the next day, my already injured neck hurt more than it ever had before. Regardless, I went to the TV tapings in Saginaw. Nobody tried to send me home. Nobody tried to send me to the hospital. If they had, I would have refused to go. I was supposed to be at TV in Saginaw, so that's where I went.

That night at the house show in Saginaw, Chief wanted González to choke slam me again. For the first time in my WWF career, I pulled a Nancy Reagan and just said, "No!" Keep in mind that I may claim to be tough, but I'm not stupid. Hurt me once, shame on you, but hurt me twice, shame on me. I wasn't willing to take that chance. "Well, maybe he won't hurt you this time," was Chief's

not-so-compelling reason for repeating his request to let my big friend manhandle me. "Well, maybe he will," was my response."

"Then go talk to Caesar about it," he shot back, "because it's his idea." And that's exactly what I did. After I explained to Vince in detail exactly why I was opposed to the follow-up choke-slam, Vince told me it was okay, and that I didn't have to do anything I wasn't comfortable doing. He then instructed me to develop an alternative plan and give the new scenario to Chief, with his blessing. I chose to have Jorge forcefully whip me into the turnbuckle, and I took a good bump out of it for him.

Jorge and I were finished. He returned to Argentina, and although we've remained in contact by telephone, I haven't seen him since. Sadly, his health has deteriorated, and he is completely broke. When the economy of his country fell apart, his entire life savings went with it. I help him as much as I can, but I can only do so much. At least

once a month, I send Jorge a "care package" consisting of things he can't buy in Argentina, like Rolaids, Tums, Lactaid, and calcium tablets. It's the least I can do. It almost seems surreal that a unique individual like Jorge González could end up in such dire circumstances.

Moving right along, we come to "number seven." My newest sidekick was to be "Mr. Hughes." Curtis Hughes, who had played college football for Kansas State and the University of Kansas, was a big, black, rough-looking, good-working heel. I first met him years earlier in Kansas City, when he and I were both working for Bob Geigel. I thought we could do very well together, and we probably would have, if Curtis hadn't been strung out on something or another. That wasn't good. (Duh!) I can't say for sure what he was on, but he admitted he had a drug problem when he had been with WCW. Drugs and business were never a good mix. I went through hell with that guy. I've been a drunken idiot for a big part of my life, but I've never been a druggie,

and I had no sympathy for anyone who was. It didn't take me long to realize that Hughes had fallen off the wagon.

The first clue I got were the wake-up calls he gave me at three and four o'clock in the morning, asking to borrow money. Who in the hell needs money at four in the morning? I just needed sleep. But not Curtis. He would call to borrow 50 bucks from me. What was really odd, though, was to learn the next day that he also woke up half of the WWF talent roster (and that was many nights, not just one) and borrowed 50 bucks from them, as well. Everyone was aware of his mounting problem, but nobody told Vince.

At first, I let Curtis travel with me, but that didn't last long. The first night we rode together, he really pulled one on me. I rented a Caddy (like a big shot), and when we arrived at the Econo Lodge in Poughkeepsie, New York, Hughes asked if he could borrow it to, as he claimed, "go eat." Me, being a dim-witted moron, let him take the

car. That was at approximately 11 p.m. I sat in the room and drank a 6-pack of beer while I watched TV. When I finished the beer, I was sleepy, so I went to bed. I figured Hughes would be okay and would be back soon. He had a key to the room, so I assumed he would be back shortly and would let himself in quietly, so as not to disturb my sleep. Under this foolish assumption, I shut off the lights and went on to sleep.

At five o'clock, I woke up because I had to go to the bathroom. When I looked at the clock, I was jarred wide awake by the realization that Hughes wasn't there! He had been gone for six hours. What was he doing? Eating a 30-course meal? Of course, my nerves wouldn't allow me to return to sleep, so there I was, at five in the morning, pacing the floor like an expectant father. I just couldn't imagine where he was. Finally, at 5:50, a few minutes before I was going to call the local jails, hospitals, and morgues, Hughes drove up in my rented Caddy, to which he had given a very interesting

customization. For some reason, he had two doughnut tires on the front end of the car. "Doughnuts," of course, are the small temporary tires used as spares, until the driver can get to a tire center and have the regular tire repaired or replaced. All rental cars have a donut for a spare, but not two donuts! When I asked Hughes where he had been and what had happened, he gave me the biggest, most unbelievable, far-fetched story I had ever heard. He said he met a girl, went to her apartment, got lost on the way back to the motel, ran into a curb, and in the process, flattened both tires. Providentially, he met a guy on the road who sold him the doughnut tire from his car. Yeah, right.

When I asked him where the two Cadillac wheels were, he pretended to be upset with himself and claimed to have forgotten them, leaving them on the side of the road where he got the flat tires. Double yeah, right. No doubt, the lying bastard sold the Caddy wheels or traded them for drugs. I knew I would see Vince McMahon in a few days at

Summer Slam in Auburn Hills, Michigan, on August 30, so I decided it was my obligation to tell him what I assumed was happening.

We had a house show in San Francisco before we were to do the TV. Knowing that I'd never let him borrow my rental car again, Hughes did what he thought was necessary: he lifted my keys and took the car without my permission. When he didn't return at all that night, all kinds of scenarios were going through my mind. The most likely, I thought, was that the car, under my name, would be involved in a drug bust. That was right in the midst of the government's witch hunt against the WWF and Vince McMahon, when they accused the WWF of steroid racketeering and other conduct charges. I knew that if Curtis Hughes, a featured WWF superstar, got busted for drugs, it would look very bad for Vince and the WWF, even though they had nothing to do with it.

To my great relief, Hughes rolled in with the sunrise with another cock-and-bull story about

girls, sex, and getting lost. Without a word, I took the keys and checked the car. To my relief, it was intact, but the gas tank indicator was on "E," and so was my level of patience. I knew what I had to do. I couldn't wait to see Vince in Auburn Hills. I had to call him right then and there, before we went to the airport and flew to Los Angeles for a show in Anaheim.

I knew I was doing the right thing. I pulled out my Day-Timer, found the Emperor's home number, and went to the nearest pay phone and called him. Keep in mind that in 1993, a pay phone was the standard method of communication. Cell phones were so expensive that very few people owned them. In fact, they were such a new item that most people hadn't ever seen one. Only successful businessmen like Vince McMahon and Jerry Lawler (who was the first person I ever knew who owned his own cell phone) could afford them. The early cell phones reminded me of the phones you would see soldiers talking on during combat in war movies. They were huge and bulky,

and it almost took two hands to hold them.

As I was saying, I found a pay phone and called Vince. When I finished explaining the situation, Vince was flabbergasted, to say the least. He told me to have the agents call him the minute I saw them in Anaheim. He also arranged to have drug testers waiting to give Hughes a urine test.

When we walked into the building and the testers pulled him aside, Hughes knew he was busted, but he did everything he could to weasel his way out of taking a leak in the jar. He first claimed that he couldn't piss with somebody watching him. When that excuse failed, he tried to piss, but claimed he just didn't need to. Dave Hebner kept giving Hughes water and soft drinks until he was able to fill the cup. Hughes, however, "accidentally" (on purpose) knocked the cup over onto the floor. Hebner told Hughes that they would stay there all night if they had to. Vince wanted a piss test, and come hell or high water, he was going to get one. More than one hour later, the big lummox

managed to squeeze out enough urine to make the test do-able. Lo and behold, to no one's surprise, he was dirty. Needless to say, it was goodbye to Mr. Hughes, and I prepared myself for number eight.

Unfortunately, it wasn't that easy this time. I paid a heavy price for Mr. Hughes' sins, and I took quite a financial blow from the turn of events, one that, sad to say, I'm still recovering from to this day. I'm sure nobody intentionally allowed this to happen to me, but it did. As I explained earlier, being on the road meant you were at all the shows: house shows, spot shows, pay-per-view shows, overseas tours, and TVs. Naturally, the more you work, the more money you make.

I had been on the road steadily for two years at this point, and I was making a very good living. I owned property in DeSoto County, and I was in the process of having it cleared in preparation for having a slab laid for my home. I had borrowed $15,000 from the bank for construction costs, so I

had a $380 monthly note, in addition to health insurance, car insurance, utilities, and other normal expenses. When I was taken off the road, I was making less than one-fourth of what I had been making while I was on the road, so as you can probably imagine, I was in trouble. I had to renegotiate the home loan for lower payments, but at a higher interest rate. What was even more frustrating was the fact that, after paying the bulldozer operator and buying a larger trailer, I was left with just $4,000, which wasn't enough to cover the septic system, the electrical contractor, the driveway company, etc. Unfortunately, thanks to Mr. Hughes, I found myself in a situation that I was unable to escape. I accepted the fact that I would have to continue to live in Lakeview Trailer Court for a while longer.

Things really weren't all that bad, but life was a little harder for a while. If I had an opportunity to do it all over again, I would do the same thing. It was the right thing to do. Vince had always treated me like gold, and there was no way I was going to

sit back and let Hughes destroy himself, and hurt the company in the process. Vince deserved to know what was happening, so I let him know. Period. When I saw Vince at Summer Slam, he told me everyone in the company should be grateful for what I had done, because the repercussions could have been severe. He thanked me profusely for my loyalty and repeated his earlier statement about how I would always have a place in the WWF family. To me, hearing Vince say that meant more than any amount of money or any amount of fame. Just being appreciated for my sincere efforts is very important for me. Steve Lombardi has that same attitude, which is possibly how we become such good friends. We really care about the company, and not just ourselves. Regardless, I was off the road, and, the sad truth is, I have never been on the road full-time again. Thanks a lot, Hughes.

I stayed at home for the next 10 days. Nobody seemed to have any idea who I would be managing or what I would be doing. Thankfully, a check

arrived in my mailbox every week during that time, but I didn't like getting paid for doing nothing. I wanted to earn my money, unlike so many of today's guys. I felt like I was cheating the company for being paid to sit at home.

Bruce Prichard finally called and told me I would be managing a team known as Well Dunn: Timothy Well (Rex King) and Steven Dunn (Steve Dahl). I was expected to be at the TV tapings on August 31, 1993, in Grand Rapids, Michigan. Unfortunately, the Wippleman curse struck again. For the most part, they were an "also-ran" tag team, so they didn't last long and never built up enough steam to get me back on the road. They didn't even have theme music, which is always a sign that the company doesn't have plans for the individuals. The three of us got along really well, but they just didn't have the charisma necessary to break out of the pack. In 1995, when Rex was suspended for smoking pot at the WrestleMania hotel in Hartford, Connecticut, and Steve Dunn was badly injured, Well Dunn was … well, done.

On September 27, 1993, I was introduced to my number nine guy (or number ten, if you consider Well Dunn to be eight and nine): Emmett "Bryan" Clark, who was billed as Adam Bomb. That was an interesting situation. I liked Bomb, but I don't think he ever reached his full potential. He was originally managed by Johnny Polo (known today as Raven), but like most people, Bomb couldn't stand him and didn't want to be around him. Personally, I liked Raven. He was always nice to me, and he still is. I don't know why people didn't like him, but Bomb was one of them. Bomb convinced the office to let me manage him, and Polo went on to manage the Quebecers, Carl Ouellet and the "loveable" Jacques Rougeau. I call him "lovable" because, even though I personally liked Jacques, and never had a problem with him, very few people liked him, either. He was obnoxious, arrogant, knew everything about everything, and always wanted things his way or no way.

One of the funny things that happened during this

time was when Bomb got his gimmick name, he had the drawing of a nuclear explosion tattooed onto his shoulder. Of course, a few years later, when he left the WWF, they retained the rights to the Adam Bomb gimmick, so he had the tattoo surgically removed, which must have been tedious, troublesome, and costly. That is the price one pays for youthful indiscretion, I suppose.

Nothing really noteworthy took place during my run with Bomb, and after a few months, I knew that this run wouldn't get me back on the road, and it didn't. I have to thank J.J. Dillon for allowing me to manage Bomb on a tour of Europe, which really boosted my morale, not to mention my pocketbook. Bomb worked with Earthquake and Rick Martel on the tour. My friend Lombardi was there, too, working with Sparky Plugg, who later became known as Hardcore Holly.

The day we were supposed to fly home from London, the IRA decided it would be a good day to launch a series of mortar attacks on Heathrow

Airport. In the process, they partially paralyzed the main air route. We were stuck across the ocean with no way to get home. Randy Savage, Alundra Blayze, Adam Bomb, Steve Lombardi, and I all jumped into a cab and went to Heathrow, anyway, having convinced ourselves that we could finagle our way home, even though nobody else in the entire United Kingdom was going anywhere.

A couple of notable things took place during that little episode. First of all, bear in mind that Heathrow was a madhouse. I had never seen so many people packed into an airport terminal. It was insane! I'm sure the U.S. airports were much worse on the day of the fateful September 11, 2001, tragedy, but that was the most chaos I had ever seen at an airport. People of every race, creed, color, and physical description were wandering around aimlessly, and talking in languages that I didn't even know existed. Police and security guards were everywhere, and announcements in umpteen different languages blared over the PA system. I was carrying two

bags: a rolling, carry-on, Samsonite suitcase, and a raggedy, old briefcase that was falling apart. Tiring of dragging them around, I had a brainstorm. In order to make my load a lot easier to manage, I decided to ditch my briefcase after emptying the contents into my suitcase. The briefcase was ready for the trash, anyway. It didn't dawn on me at the time, but abandoning a briefcase on the floor of a crowded, chaotic, just-been-bombed airport didn't get over very well with the security guards, who picked it up and brought it back to me. After questioning me as to why I would leave my briefcase behind, they opened it, searched it, and discovered that it was completely empty. They told me to hold onto it and walked away. Later that day, I got tired of carrying it, so I ripped off the lid and put it in the trash. Later, I left the bottom part sitting on the floor. Without a lid, it was evident that the briefcase was just trash. Thankfully, nobody returned it to me.

Randy Savage and Alundra each went their own

ways, but Steve, Bomb, and I decided to stick together. In an attempt to work out some kind of a deal to get us home, Bomb went to talk to an official with British Airways, but it was to no avail. All flights out had been canceled until further notice. Steve and I learned this before Bomb finished talking to the airline agent, so we decided to gather our bags, get Adam Bomb, and take a cab back to the hotel.

Here's another example of poor thinking on my part. To get our friend's attention, I yelled to him, "Bomb! Let's go, Bomb! C'mon over here, Bomb!" Now, if you don't learn anything else from this book, please remember this. Shouting "bomb" in a crowded, chaotic airport, is never a good idea. As you might expect, I was instantly surrounded by British policemen. Needless to say, they weren't amused, even after I gave them a full explanation. "It would be a good idea to call your friend Adam while you're here," the cop told me. I had to agree. Adam, or even Emmett, would be fine, but not "Bomb."

Chapter 18
Forget Me Nots

When we finally got home, we had a few days off before the next TV taping, which was held in Utica, New York on April 11, 1994. Two weeks later, Bomb turned babyface. Thankfully, I was also managing a masked wrestler named Kwang, so I wasn't left hanging this time.

On July 3, we taped four episodes of WWF Superstars in Ocean City, Maryland. It was the third day of a three-day TV taping. I wasn't figured into anything on the tapings, so the office kept me busy doing non-descript things like arguing with Howard Finkel between matches, or guest commentating at ringside with Vince. I was going to do the few things they asked and leave as quickly as possible. At least, that was my plan … until Joey Marella came to me in search of a ride. Joey was the son of the legendary wrestling

veteran, Gorilla Monsoon, who was the announcer, backstage manager, and (on-screen) President of the WWF.

Steve Lombardi wasn't on TV that day, so I was traveling alone, and there were several reasons why I didn't want to take Joey with me. First of all, J.J. Dillon gave me permission to leave early. That was something that didn't normally happen, so I wanted to take advantage of it. It was three o'clock in the afternoon, and Joey had to stay for the main event, which, more than likely, meant he wouldn't even go to the ring before ten o'clock. It was also a long drive to Newark, which was about three hours north of Ocean City. Finally, and I hate to speak ill of the dead, but I didn't like Joey all that much. He was a loser. I hate to say it, but that's the truth. He was a loser.

Lombardi and I clicked real well as traveling partners, so I enjoyed our trips together, but when Steve wasn't on the road, I preferred to travel

alone. Steve was off because he was waiting for the WWF to develop his new character, which would turn out to be a baseball player with a painted face, first known as MVP, and later called Abe "Knuckleball" Schwartz. The WWF was great at taking advantage of events in the news, and the 1994 Major League Baseball strike was the catalyst for Steve's new gimmick. It was built slowly, with vignettes and TV appearances, and even an appearance at Summer Slam 1994, where he carried an "On Strike" sign and had an interaction with the WWF's special guest, Leslie Neilsen (of Naked Gun fame). Sadly, the gimmick died a quick death.

Anyway, even if Steve had been there, there is no way Joey would have gotten a ride because Joey was always mocking Steve, and poking serious ribs at him. Steve would have definitely nipped that idea in the bud. I didn't beat around the bush or give him any of my reasons. I simply told him I couldn't take him with me. Five minutes or so later, as I was about to leave, Joey walked in and

repeated his request for a ride. I must have been Joey's last option because he seemed desperate, so I reluctantly told him I would wait. As soon as the words left my mouth, I hated myself for letting him use me like that. We weren't even friends. However, being a good-hearted dumbass, I just hated to leave him stranded. I was one of the few guys going to Newark, so I was one of the few options Joey had. Maybe the only option. Joey had been riding that week with Typhoon (who went home early with some make-believe injury) and my sometimes close "friend" Luna. Luna also had gone home, so he was without a way back to Jersey.

After what seemed like enough time to defeat the Taliban, the show was over, and I thought we would finally be on our way. I was wrong. I forgot that I was waiting for an inconsiderate loser who somehow thought he was the most handsome American since Fabio Lanzoni. After he showered, moisturized, blow-dried, deodorized, dressed, primped, posed, and tied his shoes, I

finally snapped. "It's eleven fu–ing o'clock! Let's go!" I begged. When he ignored me, I yelled, "Now!"

As we walked out, Joey stopped to talk to Tony Chimel, one of our ring technicians, then Mike Chioda, a WWF referee, and finally, Danny Davis, a referee who had been with the WWF since 1982. Fifteen minutes after we walked out of the building, we reached the parking lot and loaded our bags into my Dodge Shadow. When I got behind the wheel and pulled away from the building, Joey immediately started asking for beer. I was against the idea. Sure, I loved beer, then and now, but after eleven o'clock, I didn't think it was time to start drinking, especially not with three or more hours of highway driving ahead of us.

"Yo, dude. Just a quart won't hurt," exclaimed the nonplussed Joey. There you go. He used the word "dude." Need I explain?

"No, Joey. We need to roll." Obviously unhappy about my answer, Joey slunk into his seat and started to chain smoke his Marlboro Reds. I drove in silence, and Joey smoked in silence. As we rolled into Dover, Delaware, we stopped for gas. I went into the station to pay for the gas. I also bought a bottle of Gatorade and an ice cream cup, while Joey walked next door to Hardee's to buy a Mushroom 'N' Swiss burger and a large Sprite. As we both returned to the car, Joey offered to drive. He finished his burger, while I drank my Gatorade. My ice cream was too frozen to eat, so I sat it on the back seat to thaw a bit. It had been a long day, and I was getting quite sleepy. Joey noticed this, and in typical Joey fashion, said, "Yo, dude. Go on to sleep. I'll wake you if I get sleepy, dude! Don't worry, dude. I'm wide awake."

After all of those "dudes," I should have put two and two together, and realized that I was dealing with an imbecile, but I didn't. I guess I trusted him, for the simple fact that he had been in the

business practically as long as I had. He hadn't killed himself yet, so he must be a competent driver. With this in mind, I tilted the seat back and prepared to take a nap. Almost as an afterthought, I buckled my seatbelt, and then, as sleepy as a whore in church, I fell fast asleep.

Before I went to sleep, Joey told me that if he got sleepy, he would wake me up. True to his word, he did … but not in the traditional sense. I must tell you that this is very hard for me to write. When I first wrote this, it took me several hours, and I fought the urge to break down the entire time. Here goes.

Yes, Joey woke me up. I was in a deep sleep when I was jarred suddenly and violently awake by the loudest, most ungodly clanging you could possibly imagine, and it was pitch dark. I heard the horrifying sound of something repeatedly bashing and slamming into the vehicle. I heard glass shattering, and felt it flying through the car as the car careened violently and erratically down a

steep embankment. Every time I thought the car would come to a stop, it slid or rolled over again, each rollover more violent and more destructive than the previous one. In my terrified heart, I accepted the fact that I was going to die, and I asked Jesus Christ to please take me to Heaven. The car continued to roll faster and faster towards our almost certain death, when, in a miracle from God himself, the car came to a rest, lying on the passenger side. The engine must have been revving around 7,000 rpms. I wasn't sure if the impact had jammed the accelerator to the floor, or if Joey's foot was somehow pushing down on it, but I had a feeling that it would explode if I didn't turn off the engine. In the maddeningly intense darkness, I managed to locate the ignition switch, switch it off, and remove the key from the switch. Normally, keys can't be removed from the ignition switch while the car is in gear, but somehow, they came out when I pulled on them. In situations like that, nobody can explain the superhuman strength that can evolve into a person, but that was the first of two "paranormal" feats I

managed to pull off during the situation. Later, interestingly enough, the paramedics had to actually pry the key-chain from my grip, which I'm sure was a stress-induced, involuntary response on my part.

As the engine stopped racing, I sat in utter and complete shock in the eerie silence. Finally, I calmly asked, "Joey! You're dead, aren't you?"

Now, I know that's a weird thing to ask, but in a situation like that, there's no telling what a person might say. For some reason, I thought it was appropriate to ask Joey if he was dead. When there was no response, I asked again, and still got no response, to which I finally freaked out and screamed hysterically, "JOEY, YOU'RE DEAD!"

I didn't know how badly I may have been hurt, either. As I gathered my senses and began to get my bearings, I realized that I had lost my glasses during the accident. I am practically blind without my glasses, so I was almost completely helpless. I

groped through the wreckage, patting my hands over glass and twisted metal, hoping to find them. When that failed, I remembered that I kept an extra pair of glasses in a Tupperware container in my suitcase. I had to get out of the car and get my suitcase. To accomplish that, I had to crawl over Joey's body. There was no way other way to get out of the car. "Sorry, Joey," I sobbed, as I eased my way across his lifeless corpse. That was a horrifying thing to have to do. I eased my body out through the shattered driver's side window, and as I crashed to the ground, I was disoriented, shaken up beyond belief, bleeding from the nose, mouth, and hand, and petrified with fear. I carefully fumbled my way to the trunk, only to discover that the trunk lid had been torn from the vehicle, and our bags were scattered over the hillside and ravine where the car had rolled and bounced. I knew I only had a slim chance of finding my glasses, but I also knew that I had to summon help. I didn't have the option of calling on a cell phone, so my only choice was to climb up the hill to the highway and flag down a passing

motorist.

It was about three o'clock in the morning, and we were in Jersey, although, at the time, I had no idea of exactly where we were. Oddly enough, right up until the time that I pulled the keys out of the ignition switch, the radio continued to play. Patricia Rushen's 1982 hit, "Forget Me Nots," was playing when the "thud" of Joey's exit from the road woke me up, and it was still playing when the car skidded to a halt deep in the woods. How appropriate. "Forget me nots." I certainly couldn't forget this.

Blindly, I crawled up the hillside in the general direction of the sound of passing traffic, and slowly but surely, I made my way up to the shoulder of the Jersey turnpike. Bloody, muddy, blind, and in a general state of despair, I waved my arms and yelled for help, hoping that someone would stop. No one did, but I can't really blame the people for not stopping. It was dark, late at night (or early in the morning, depending on how

you look at it), and I looked like a bum. The car was so far down into the woods that it wasn't visible from the highway, so no one even knew that an accident had taken place. I became desperate, and desperate times call for desperate measures.

Cautiously and, of course, blindly, I made my way back to the steep drop off, and made my way down to the car. Once again, I desperately searched for my glasses, but my efforts were wasted. I then did something that was impossible … or so it would seem. I pulled the front bumper off the car and dragged it up the hill, figuring that if someone saw me with it, they would put two and two together and, hopefully, stop to help us. Now, bear in mind the magnitude of the situation, because now, as I sit writing this sad story in a motel room in Olive Branch, Mississippi, I couldn't go outside and rip the bumper off of a car if someone gave me a million dollars to do it; but that night (morning) in Jersey, I did it without blinking an eye. For all I know, the bumper had probably been practically hanging off of the car

from the impact of the accident. My "superhuman" adrenaline rush was probably magnified in my delirious mind, but at the time, just like my removing the keys from the ignition, it seemed almost surreal. I'll never know if it was just a matter of the damaged state of the vehicle that allowed me to do those things (the most likely scenario), an unbelievable adrenaline rush, or divine intervention. I'm probably better off not knowing.

When I finally stood on the shoulder of the road, I frantically waved the bumper over my head and screamed for help. Several cars whizzed by, until finally, a tractor-trailer stopped. Thank God. The driver could tell that something was wrong. When I tearfully and emotionally told him what happened, he got on his CB radio and called for help. I sat on the guardrail, shaking and feeling sick to my stomach. In a very short time, the accident scene was lit up and populated like a mini-city. State highway patrolmen, local policemen, fire trucks, ambulances, wreckers,

flatbed trailers, sheriff's deputies, and EMTs were everywhere.

I never again saw the original trucker who stopped to help me, but I'll never forget his name: Tobias Schrock of Delaware. With all the chaos going on around me, I never got an opportunity to thank him for stopping. I hope he reads this, or someone he knows reads this, and passes along my sentiments. I hope you're doing well, Mr. Schrock. God bless you, sir.

The scene, as you can imagine, was a madhouse. When nobody would confirm to me that Joey was dead, I became really upset. In my heart, I knew he was dead, but I thought maybe — just maybe — he was alive, but unconscious, or in a coma. However, when I crawled over Joey's body to escape the wreckage, and again when I went back to look for my glasses, I smelled something that was not from this world. No matter how hard I try, I could never describe it, but it was definitely the smell of death. I have no medical

training, and with my limited education, I never even had a science class, but I knew what I smelled. I haven't smelled that odor before or since. Suffice it to say, I knew Joey was dead, but I had to have confirmation, one way or the other. "It doesn't look good for your friend," was one of the comments I heard. "I don't think he's going to make it," was another. Later, I was told there was a policy against revealing deaths at the scene of an accident, for fear people in the situation would freak out or something, but, as I learned later, Joey was killed on impact. His head was smashed apart and almost ripped from his body. Say what you will, but to this day, I believe that's the reason God took my glasses from me, so I wouldn't be further traumatized by having that gruesome sight embedded in my subconscious for the rest of my life. Thank you, God.

It was bad enough that nobody would tell me whether or not Joey was dead, but nobody would tell me how badly I was hurt, either. I was so shaken up that I had no clue as to my own

condition. I was scared beyond belief. I was confused.

The next several or more minutes were a confusing blur of events that blended together. I vaguely remember a very insensitive New Jersey State Trooper attempting to ask me a series of really stupid questions, such as Joey's social security number, and other ridiculous things like that. Jeez! I don't even know my own mother's social security number. I had just been through the most traumatic experience of my life, and that moron wanted information from me as if Joey and I were trying to co-sign a loan for each other. After he caught on to the fact that maybe — just maybe — I wasn't up for that line of questioning, he "helpfully" informed me that he would catch up with me later. Oh, boy. I was really looking forward to that.

I was really struck by the casual way everyone involved was treating the matter, and the very crass and open lack of sensitivity. As the

ambulance crew rolled me onto a gurney and slid me into the back of their rig, I kept asking them how badly I was hurt. Was I injured internally? Did they at least think I was? Would they at least tell me? Mentally, by that time, I was a basket case. Physically, all I knew was that I was bleeding from several parts of my body, my head felt like it had been hit by Triple H's sledgehammer, and I couldn't see. With no earthly idea about the state of my condition, the short ride to the hospital was very nerve wracking, and I was blind, to boot. Legally! They wheeled me into the trauma center and got busy right away — got busy by asking for my insurance information, driver's license, address, etc. I was becoming very irate. I finally snapped. "G– dammit. If ya'll are gonna let me sit here and die, you don't need my fu–ing information! Just throw me outside in the mother-fu–ing street!" I was fed up with all the bullsh–, and if I hadn't been blind as a bat, I would have walked out and made my way home, because those people obviously didn't care whether or not I lived or died, as long as the paperwork was filed

properly.

Thankfully, the first person (since the initial trucker) who cared about something other than red tape came out to see what all the fuss was about. He was a young doctor who showed genuine concern. He told the pencil-pushing, heartless bitch behind the desk to let him take me to get checked out. She could get my billing information later. He took me into the X-ray room and examined me visually before he took the X-rays. He told me my nose was broken, I needed several stitches in my left hand, and that I had several glass fragments embedded in my head. He then told me that I needed to be X-rayed in order to determine if I had suffered any internal damage. I asked him if we could go to a phone first, so I could let Steve Lombardi know what happened. Steve could get the word back to the office, who would certainly want to know about a situation of this magnitude. The doctor took me to a phone and dialed Steve's number for me, since I was visually impaired at the moment. When Steve

answered the phone, it was four o'clock in the morning, so he was understandably groggy. I heard his wife, Sandra, in the background, say, "Oh, no. This can't be good news." How right she was. As I tried to explain the situation to Steve, I was so agitated and incoherent that it was all but impossible for my friend to understand me, so he asked me to put the doctor on the phone. The doctor explained the entire situation to Steve, and finally, within my earshot, he told Steve that Joey Marella was indeed dead. The doctor handed me the phone, and after a very emotional conversation, Steve assured me that he would get the word out, and that he would do whatever he could to help me, including getting another pair of glasses to me.

After I thanked Steve and told him that I would keep him up to date on developments, I hung up and was wheeled to the X-ray area. After my X-rays, they wheeled me to a private room, put me in a bed, and put catheters into each of my wrists and one of my arms. I never saw the kind, young doctor again. When I asked about him, I was told

that he had gone home, and another doctor was now in charge. I laid in that bed, and laid in that bed ... and laid some more, as medical personnel walked past my door for hours, not even acknowledging my simpering presence. Finally, a distinguished-looking gentleman walked in and sat down next to my bed. I thought they had finally sent a doctor into my room to tell me where I stood. Imagine my reaction when I found out he wasn't a doctor at all. He was a priest! "Have you accepted Jesus Christ as your Savior?" he asked. "Are you ready to meet your creator?" I went berserk. "Yes, I love Jesus, but I'm not ready to meet him today!" I screamed, and to the clergyman's shock, I ripped the catheters and IV's out of my arms, and jumped out of the bed. I made such a scene that they sent security and several medical professionals to my room. I demanded to know what was going on. Finally, the doctor in charge came in, and actually feigned surprise that none of the nurses had apprised me of the situation.

Basically, this is what he explained to me: I had a

broken nose, which, until they got me to the hospital, had been bleeding like a sieve. When I had been standing on the shoulder of the Jersey turnpike, screaming desperately for help, my air passages were opened to an extreme, and all the blood I was swallowing had gone into my lungs. The X-rays had revealed large amounts of blood in both of my lungs, which led them to believe I had two punctured lungs. That, in turn, led them to call a priest, thinking that I might possibly die. However, the young doctor who took the X-rays, and who had since gone home, followed the X-rays with a physical examination involving a stethoscope, a rubber hammer, and other procedures. He determined that my lungs were fine and determined the source of the blood. Other than a few bumps and bruises, I was fine. He told the new attending physician, who, in turn, told one of the nurses to tell me … but she didn't.

Another nurse, who was informed of my "punctured lungs" by the X-ray technician, called

in the priest. Well, that certainly made me feel a lot better, as did the state trooper who came in right about that time. He brought me my crushed Halliburton suitcase, which contained the uncrushed Tupperware container, which contained my uncrushed spare pair of glasses. That was like the beginning of a new day for me. I was no longer helpless. I could see!

After I got stitched and taped up, I had to figure out a way to get home to Mississippi, so the following afternoon, I arranged for a car service to pick me up in Mount Holly, New Jersey, and take me to Newark. Once that was arranged, I had a 5-hour wait, so the hospital personnel let me sleep in my room until it was time to leave. I couldn't sleep very well, that's for sure. I kept waking up to the sound of the initial impact, and I would shiver, shake, and cry. Real men do cry. I'm living proof. That nightmare, unfortunately, continued for a long time, and it still comes along occasionally.

When I woke up from my nap, my body was so devastated from the violent beating it had taken that I couldn't walk. When it was time to leave, a nurse had to wheel me to the car. The doctor told me it was a normal bodily reaction to intense trauma, and that I would be back to normal in a couple of days. Well, I was … physically, anyway. Mentally, I don't know if I'll ever be the way I was before the accident.

Before I discuss the aftermath of the accident, and all the love and outpourings of affection, sympathy, and true friendship that I received in the weeks to come, let me take this opportunity to vent about something that I've been asked to do on several occasions in the past few years.

Bob Clarke, who is a real nobody in this business, got it in his head that, not only was this a business of pussies and sissies, but I was completely at his beck and call. At the drop of a hat, he expected me to put aside my work and responsibilities to sit in a medical waiting room

with fully-grown men who had to get an X-ray of their sore wrist or injured shoulder. Why? I have so much patience, but only so much. I never could understand why Bob Clarke decided that grown men needed me to go to the doctor with them, where I sat in the waiting room and read outdated issues of People Magazine for three or four hours. I would get back to my hotel room at ridiculous hours of the night (or morning), just to play babysitter to a guy who had a broken finger or a hangnail. It was absurd and a complete abuse of authority. I had looked death right in the eyes, and came as close as any living person can get to dying a brutal, violent, sudden, painful death. And yet, I didn't want, or need, somebody to put their life on hold while they sat with me in the waiting room of a hospital.

When Steve Lombardi dislocated his elbow so badly that it actually bent in the wrong direction, he drove himself to the hospital, and when the doctors finished treating him, he drove himself home. Steve and I are both old-school. There was

no earthly reason to inconvenience anybody else when we have to go to the doctor. That's why we have Chris Brannon, the WWE Athletic Trainer. He's the trainer, so let him "train." Expect him to do more than just tape ankles and walk around like a big shot.

Another thing along those lines: I came within a centimeter of death, and I didn't miss one day of work. Not one. Don't come to me and expect a sympathetic ear for a guy with a sore elbow, who spent three weeks at home and made more money than me, while I was at work every day. Whatever happened to paying dues?

My neck is so messed up that my doctors tell me it will never get better, but will only get worse with time, and if I take one more bad bump, I could be paralyzed. That's how bad it is. So to Bob Clarke, since you're the guy who is always trying to run the company, and is constantly worrying about this guy with a broken finger, or that guy with a sore shoulder, I say to you: I'm the last person in

whom you'll find a sympathetic ear. The cry-babies of the new millennium, who weren't even born when I broke into the business in 1979, can all kiss my Mississippi ass.

Anyway, when I got off the plane in Memphis (finally), I still had a tough time standing upright, let alone walking, so I had to get a wheelchair attendant to push me to the baggage claim area, where I was met and picked up by my good friend, Greg Wayne Peal, Buddy Wayne's son, and his wife, Vicki. I stayed at Buddy Wayne's house for three days while my wounds healed and I recovered my strength. I'll never forget the treatment I got from Buddy, Greg, Vicki, and Buddy Wayne's young son, Aubrey, who went on to become a heck of a referee in the USWA. They all made me feel like I was at home and catered to my every need. I'll never forget the meals, the place to sleep, the beer, and the friendship they gave me during that difficult time.

One other thing I'll never forget was the

unbelievable number of messages on my home answering machine. The messages were completely heart-warming. I'd rather not try to list the people who called to show their love and concern, for fear of inadvertently forgetting someone, so I'd like to take this time to once again thank everyone who cared. Your concern helped a lot. One call I'll never forget is the one I received from Vince McMahon. It was great to be able to talk to Vince. Vince told me to feel free to call him any time, day or night, even if I had to wake him up, to talk about the horrors I was going through. He was there for me above and beyond his position in the WWF. He was there for me as a friend, and that meant more than anything. Another call I'll never forget was the one from Joey's father, Gino Marella. Our conversation was much different from the one I had with Vince. Gino cried, I cried, and we both openly talked about what had happened. He told me how happy he was that I survived. He even said God must have wanted a referee, and not a manager, in his "territory" in heaven. I thanked Gino and sincerely

told him how much his call meant to me.

I know the politically correct thing to do here would be to say how much I loved Joey, and how much his death affected me, but that would make me a liar. Joey was a loser, and not only was it a miracle that he didn't kill me, it was a miracle that he didn't kill himself or someone else sooner than he did. I almost died due to my good nature and the fact that I waited for Joey. I should have said, "No," like everybody else, and I almost paid for my kindness with my life. I was lucky enough to live through it, but I lost a lot of mobility in my neck and $10,000 in doctor and hospital fees. Thanks, Joey. Thanks for not having any insurance. Thanks for not having enough responsibility to stay awake at the wheel. And, finally, thanks for NOT GIVING A FU– ABOUT ANYBODY ELSE IN THE WORLD! If you had a death wish, why did you have to include me in it? I know you didn't do it on purpose, Joey, but I paid for your mistake with years of nightmares and a lot of cash. You may have paid your debt in full

with your life, but I'm still paying. Sorry, Joey. You get no sympathy from me.

Three weeks later, on August 1, 1994, I was back to work at TV in Youngstown, Ohio.

Chapter 19
Bertha Faye, My Trailer Park Girlfriend

My run with Kwang was very uninteresting. When the word got out that I was going to manage Kwang, I heard great things about him from so many people. Bam Bam Bigelow, Jeff Jarrett, Gangrel, Luna, Sean Waltman, and so many others, in and out of the WWF, told me about the incredible greatness of Kwang. I was told he was gifted with Shawn Michael's work, Sid's physique, Hulk Hogan's charisma, and Vince McMahon's knowledge. My ship had arrived! I pictured myself living in a Beverly Hills mansion, with a Mercedes-Benz roadster parked in the driveway, and a Olympic-sized swimming pool in the back yard.

Don't get me wrong. I liked Kwang, but what a

disappointment. Kwang was actually Juan Rivera, a pudgy, uncharismatic, decent-working fellow who had made a name for himself in Puerto Rico as TNT. Billed as a martial arts expert, he had one good move: a karate kick in the corner. He would also spew a Kabuki-ish green mist from his mouth at his opponents. Other than that, he was a Puerto Rican Tony Falk with a mask and a tan.

Well Dunn, Adam Bomb, and Kwang, just never got over. I hate to sound redundant, but the truth is the truth, hence the title of the book, "Wrestling with the Truth." I was just along for a boring ride into obscurity.

The only noteworthy thing that happened during my run with Kwang was the unexpected return of Sid in January 1995. When I received word of that news, I was almost as scared as I had been during the accident that killed Joey Marella. When I chose (wisely) to remain in the WWF when Sid chose to leave, his words to me over the phone were simply, "Don't ever, EVER, call me again. I

hate you." That was the response I got from Sid when I decided to give him the courtesy of letting him know that I was going to stay with the WWF. And now, this was to be my first time to see the massive Mr. Eudy since our flight back to Memphis together.

Only the closest of friends can become the most serious enemies, and I didn't want to have a giant sasquatch as my enemy, so I was very apprehensive about Sid's return. As I expected, our reunion, which took place at the WWF Superstars TV tapings in West Palm Beach, Florida, on January 24, 1995, wasn't exactly heart-warming. It was actually fairly intense. I avoided Sid for the first few hours of his appearance, but I knew I would eventually have to talk to him, so, at Scott Hall's urging, I went into the room where Sid was sitting and spoke to him. The first words out of his mouth were, "Do you still wish my wife and kid were dead?" I was dumbfounded. I didn't know how to answer the question. I never wished that. I loved Sid's wife and his son, Frankie, and I

would never wish them any harm. I had no idea where he got such a flagrantly absurd idea. I can only assume that somebody in the Memphis territory had told him that in an attempt to stir up sh– and satisfy their own perverted sense of amusement. In dismay, I just turned and walked out of the room. I was very uncomfortable. A few minutes later, I gathered up my balls and walked back into the dressing room. I asked Sid if he would mind talking to me in private. He looked at me for a moment with his hard to define "Sid" look, then stood up and followed me to an empty stairwell.

We had a very intense conversation, with Sid being the first to say his piece. I listened with an open mind. Sid felt as if I had let him down, and even stabbed him in the back, when I chose to remain in the WWF when he quit. When he finished, I told him I didn't see it that way at all. Sure, he arranged for my tryout and initial meeting with the company. I could never forget that, and I was thankful for everything he did for

me. If it wasn't for Sid, I may never have received the opportunity that I did. However, once I demonstrated my abilities to Vince and the powers-that-be who were directly involved in the hiring process, and they hired me, I didn't want to give my notice just because Sid was angry with the company. I spent the majority of my adult life working towards one ultimate goal: becoming a member of the WWF, and I wasn't going to throw it all away, for whatever reason. I explained this to Sid, and as he sat and listened, I poured out my heart. To my pleasant surprise, Sid extended his hand in friendship. We shook hands, then hugged. Big Sid told me that he could see my point of view, and he told me the entire matter would be forgotten. He also admitted that, deep down, he knew I never said those awful things about his family, and he also knew that I never wanted to do him wrong. I was so happy to get back on good grounds with Sid. I considered him to be a friend, and there were no differences between us that could change my feelings towards him.

It was during this time that my old friend, Eddie Gilbert, was found dead in his studio apartment in Puerto Rico, the territory in which he was wrestling. The cause of death on February 18, 1995 was a heart attack. He did good things for many people during his much-too-short life. Booking was Eddie's passion, so I hope he is doing the booking in the HWF (Heaven Wrestling Federation). But, Eddie … please don't book me anytime soon.

My only dilemma now was to determine where my career was headed. I was still off the road. Kwang couldn't get over in a whore house with a fist full of $50 bills, and I was deep in a financial hole, thanks to Joey Marella. As the saying goes: There wasn't anything wrong. There just wasn't anything right.

At the In Your House taping on May 14, 1995, Juan Rivera (Kwang) was completely made over as a new character. He became "Savio Vega," another character which never got over. They also

made him a babyface and took him away from me. Once again, I was a man without a country.

My next protégé would end up being my last one. You know the saying about saving the best for last? That's all bullsh–. I suppose I should tread lightly since the next person I was "saddled" with is dead, but do you want tact and subtlety, or do you want honesty? Honesty? Okay, here we go. To those who are offended by what I have to say, I'm sorry.

My next managee was the late Rhonda Singh, billed as "Bertha Faye" and promoted as my "trailer-park girlfriend." After training with lady wrestling legend, Mildred Burke, Rhonda broke into the business in 1979, and made quite a name for herself in Japan and Mexico as Monster Ripper. "Bertha Faye" made her WWF debut on Monday Night RAW on April 3, 1995 in Poughkeepsie, New York.

As a rule, it takes a while before you begin to

dislike people who come along in your life. Not Bertha. My dislike for her was practically instantaneous, and I think the feeling was mutual. Bertha was one of those people who talked constantly and knew everything about everything. Besides that, she was a problem drinker. I've admitted that I've done my share of drinking over the years, but by this stage in my life, I had grown up and learned the meaning of moderation and self-control. Those were foreign concepts to Bertha. She would even drink in the daytime occasionally, which didn't sit well with me. I finally had to talk to J.J. Dillon about the situation. J.J. was concerned enough to confront Bertha about her problem. To her credit, she didn't deny it, but to her dis-credit, she didn't stop doing it, either, so I guess J.J.'s conversation with her was useless.

From June through November 1995, Bertha worked with Alundra Blaze every night. Bertha won the WWE Women's title from Blaze at SummerSlam on August 27, 1995, and dropped it

back on the October 23 edition of Monday Night RAW. I have to give her the props she deserves. Their matches, while not great, were good enough to justify her continued bookings, but after several months, she became so messed up that the office realized she was becoming a liability. When Bertha dropped the belt back to Alundra, J.J. told me they were going to finish her up in a month.

On November 20, J.J. asked Steve Lombardi and me to drive Bertha and four Japanese lady wrestlers — Tomoko Wannabe, Aja Kong, Kyoko Inoue, and Happarita Asari — from Washington D.C. to Salisbury, Maryland, and then back to their hotel at the Dulles Airport. From beginning to end, the trip was a nightmare. I refer to it as the "trip from hell."

To accommodate the five large ladies, Steve and I rented the largest van available, then went to pick up Bertha and the Oriental contingent. It started off innocently enough, with Bertha and the others

loading their bags into the van. With the addition of my luggage, Steve's luggage, six big wrestlers, and one pipsqueak manager, the van was full to capacity. When we arrived at the building, we all exited the van, looking for all the world like a bunch of circus clowns climbing out of a Volkswagen in the center ring. The next day, the girls all went to the local mall. When we all met back at the van for the return trip to D.C., the girls not only had their bags with them, but enough clothes, shoes, hats, toys, make-up, and knickknacks, to outfit a third-world nation! I've never seen so many boxes, bags, packages, bundles, and shopping sacks, all in one place in my life. Steve Lombardi and I also had our own luggage. To top things off, Jerry Lawler wanted to ride with us, and he had luggage, as well. I didn't see how we could possibly load all of that junk into the van, and trust me, it wasn't easy. Lawler ended up driving. Steve sat in the passenger seat. I sat on the armrest between Lawler and Steve. The Japanese girls and Bertha sat in the two back seats, with bags, suitcases, and packages

on the floor, on their laps, on the seats, and in the back of the van. There was absolutely no room to spare. To make matters worse, Bertha was drinking heavily, so we had to stop every 30 minutes so she could use the bathroom. Of course, each time she got out, we had to unload a large number of the bags, then reload after she got back into the van. That was really fun. (Not really.)

When we finally arrived at the hotel at Dulles Airport, we unloaded the cargo, the people, and the luggage. Bertha then informed us that she had forgotten to check their itinerary, and that they actually were all staying in the Reagan National Airport area. It was almost two o'clock in the morning, and my ears didn't welcome that news. I decided to get them booked in the hotel where Lombardi, Lawler, and I were staying, and get a shuttle to take them to the National Airport later that morning. Unfortunately, the hotel was full, so I had to try to explain to a group of non-English speaking, lady wrestlers that we had to reload and get back into the van. I've had easier times talking

to an infant and explaining why he shouldn't cry.

Finally, in roughly the amount of time it took the ancient Egyptians to build a pyramid, we were all back in the van. Within 25 minutes, we were completely lost. That was a new record for us. We drove around in circles until we finally found the highway that led to the National Airport, only to hit a major, bumper-to-bumper, traffic jam at 3:30 in the morning. That was a new one for me, Steve, and Lawler. No one else seemed to be too concerned about our plight, however. Bertha continued to drink and talk incessantly, while the others happily chattered away to each other, oblivious to their surroundings or the time of day. Finally, at the end of the long line of traffic (or the beginning, depending on your perspective), we saw the root of the problem: a car had smashed into the back end of a tractor-trailer. The driver's side of the car had been demolished, and from where we sat, it looked like a body with no head was sitting in the drivers seat! That was the most unnerving thing I had ever seen, particularly when

it dawned on me that if not for the grace of God, I could have ended up just like that a few months prior.

When traffic finally began moving (albeit slowly, thanks to the morbid curiosity seekers and gawking rubber-neckers), we made our way to the hotel and repeated the unloading process. Steve, Lawler, and I said our way overdue goodbyes and headed to Baltimore/Washington International, where our flights home were scheduled. By the time we arrived in Baltimore, it was 6 a.m. We were zonked. Lawler had a 7:30 flight, so we dropped him off at the terminal. Steve and I had flights at 10:30 and 11:05, respectively, so we checked into a room at the Red Roof Inn and slept for three hours. That short nap was almost like a tease, and we certainly weren't ready to get up when the alarm went off at nine o'clock, but we didn't have a choice. Never, again, I swore to myself. Never again.

I didn't see Bertha again until several years

later. When the WWF taped Monday Night RAW on May 28, 2001, in her hometown of Calgary, Alberta, she came to the show. Even though the two of us had never really gotten along, I certainly bore no grudge against her, so I greeted her with a hug and cordial conversation, as did Steve Lombardi. Little did we know that it would be the last time we would ever see her. A little more than two months later, she committed suicide. I was in utter shock. I have no idea how she ended her life, or what inner demons troubled her so much that she no longer had the desire to live, but I can only hope that she has found some semblance of peace.

As I flew home, I wondered what my next job assignment would be. I was off for 10 days, and during that time, Vince called. "Bruno. Do you have any experience as a referee?"

Of course, I did, and I told him so. He laid out a scenario that he had in mind for me. Basically, for three weeks' worth of TV tapings, he wanted me to

walk around ringside with a notebook, and act as if I was taking notes of some kind. After the third week, Jim Ross (in his pre-J.R. days) was to stop me and ask me exactly what it was that I was doing. My reply would be that I was making a full report of the WWF's officials and/or referees, and I was going to "file it" with WWF president Gorilla Monsoon. To make a long story short, Monsoon would eventually appoint me to the position of referee, and after refereeing the matches, fair and square, for an undetermined period of time, I would turn heel and begin managing a new heel, or group of heels. The angle would kick-start my managerial career all over again.

Well, sometimes the best laid plans tend to go astray, and that was the case this time. Just like a lot of the projected angles and gimmicks in our crazy business, that one just fell through the cracks. It began with a little bit of fanfare, though. Monsoon called me out on TV and, with a bit of pomp and circumstance, presented me with

an official WWF referee jersey. He made the statement that he believed I had sincerely changed my ways, and that nobody would know how to enforce the rules any better than Harvey Wippleman, the guy who was the best at breaking them. The first step in the process was for me to be the first referee to be so strict, so intolerant, and so one-sided in my favoritism of the babyfaces, that I would quickly come across as a real "enforcer" in the ring — not due to my size, but due to the "authority" bestowed on me by my striped shirt.

A new sheriff was in town! I disqualified Owen Hart, fast-counted Jeff Jarrett, and disqualified Lawler during his match with Jake Roberts. I was a babyface through and through, with momentum building up as the weeks went by. Unfortunately, nothing developed. After a few weeks of showing extreme prejudice and unbridled enthusiasm, the agents told me to referee normally. There were no more interviews, or extra-special finishes, and I was put into a serious spot as a special, no-

nonsense referee. Since I was unable to get back on the road in that manner, I attempted to go about things in a different way. I went to Steve Taylor, the guy in charge of the normal, non-gimmick refs, and explained that it looked to me as if the "push" for my new character wasn't coming, and since I was officially a referee, I wondered if he could put me on the road as a regular ref. Unfortunately, there weren't any spots available on the roster for another steady, on-the-road ref. I understood. I would never want to knock somebody out of a spot just to secure a spot for myself. I'm not that type of a guy. I thanked Steve, and continued to ref occasionally on TV and in occasional dark matches, but that was about it.

Shortly thereafter, jealousy reared its ugly head. The WWF came out with a referee action figure, and although the plastic man didn't look like me, my picture was on the box, and the figure in the picture was wearing a wristwatch. I'm the only ref who wore a wristwatch. That wasn't the first coincidence in the situation. As a matter of

fact, in a few minutes, I'll enlighten you about another bizarre coincidence that took place, but first, back to the "doll."

If you remember, I had been in a bit of a financial struggle (which I accept blame for because it all began when I was crashing cars and going to jail in Memphis) ever since the Joey wreck, and the royalties I would have received from sales of the action figure would have gotten me completely out of debt and let me restart my life. Instead, Steve Taylor and Carolyn Colford (Steve's assistant) were pissed that I was receiving the honor and privilege of being represented in the likeness of a toy. They made sure that my little moment in the sun (and my delusions of financial freedom) would pass very quickly. Carolyn told me personally, in front of Steve Lombardi, that she was going to call one of her friends in the office and make sure the royalties from the sale of the referee figure were to be split nine ways. She thought it was (her words) "bullsh–" and "unfair to the eight steady refs" that I was going to reap sole benefits from the

item.. Well, Carolyn. I think it's bullsh– that those guys were all on the road and making real money, while I was sitting at home, struggling to make ends meet.

That, in itself, was a hard slap in the face (and the wallet), but then "coincidence" number two came along, which was like rubbing salt into the wounds left by the face slap. Timmy White, a full time ref (and heck of a nice guy) got hurt. That sucked, and I hated it for him. However, I wanted to go on the road full-time while Timmy was off, with the full understanding that when Timmy was well, he would be back in his spot and I would be taken off the road. I was fine with that. A couple of months of full-time work was better than none at all. Unfortunately, I didn't get the spot. I don't want to comment too much about the guy to whom Steve Taylor gave all of Tim's bookings, but suffice it to say that he wasn't even an employee of the WWF, he wasn't well-liked by anyone, and unlike me, he hadn't even requested the spot. His name doesn't matter (although his initials are,

appropriately, B.S.), but what did matter was that he didn't have an action figure with his face on the box! I immediately went to Steve Taylor, who gave me the biggest bull– explanation I ever heard in my life. It was a rambling, halting, half-hearted cover-up for whatever reason they had for holding me down. I don't care what Steve Taylor says. That's what happened. I was irate, to say the least. They screwed me on both the royalties and the bookings. I must be a total idiot to admit that I like Steve Taylor. I liked him then and I like him now, but I don't understand why they did what they did. Steve and Carolyn mistakenly thought they ran the company, and since I wasn't one of their handpicked brown-nosers, they didn't want me to succeed. That's one of the long list of reasons as to why they're no longer with the company.

J.J. Dillon was sympathetic to my situation, and he helped me out whenever he could. He suggested I discuss the matter with Vince, which I did. Steve Lombardi accompanied me to the sit-

down, which I appreciated, as well. Vince shook his head as if he couldn't believe his ears. Lombardi, who has always been good about taking up for me whenever he thought I was allowing myself to be walked on, told Vince everything Carolyn had said about the doll situation. Vince thought it was the most absurd thing he had ever heard. "Of course Bruno should get the royalties," he exclaimed. Bruno is a talent, a character, who is being featured, not a normal referee. That's the way it should be!"

It was too late to do anything about Billy Silverman ... oops, I mean B.S., so I didn't even bother to mention the bookings I wasn't able to get. I thanked Vince for his time and assessment of the matter, and Steve and I left the room. My words to Carolyn Colford, which were only Vince's words, fell on deaf ears. "Well, I've already talked to (whoever it was she talked to), and she's straightening out the royalties," said Carolyn.

Without another word, she turned and walked away. Steve and I looked at each other in disbelief. I could have (and probably should have) gone back to Vince and "tattled" on Carolyn, but the one thing I have never been is a crybaby, so I let the matter go. On the inside, however, my blood was boiling. I hope all those full-time, on-the-road referees really enjoyed their royalty money. I hope that along with their normal pay, they didn't wind up in a higher tax bracket. I consolidated my debts into one, easy monthly payment with an interest rate that I wish my savings account had. I'm no longer bitter about it … at least, not much.

As I said, J.J. Dillon always tried to look out for me. He gave me his permission to go to any show I could find near my home, and tell the agents I was supposed to ref at least one match, so I could get a payday. I would rent an inexpensive car (to avoid putting miles and excessive wear on my own vehicle) and drive to the towns that weren't unreasonably far away from my house, such as

Nashville (220 miles), St. Louis (300 miles), Louisville (410 miles) Evansville (375 miles), and several others in that mileage spectrum. I've driven a lot further than that for a lot less money in my pre-WWF days, so I really didn't mind the miles. To this day, if the last town on a run is 500 miles or less from my house, I will more often than not drive home. Anyway, even though I didn't mind the mileage, I cursed Steve Taylor and Carolyn Colford with every passing exit sign, each of which reminded me about why I was forced to drive all over the place just to make a living.

On September 14, 1996, I drove six hours to get to Louisville, since the week before, J.J. had given me the okay to do so. However, when I walked into the building, the agent in charge, Tony Garea, asked me, in his typically dry, Kiwi humor, what I was doing there. "J.J. told me I could come," was my response, which was met with unexpected laughter from Garea. "Well, get J.J. to pay you then," he replied. Confused, I asked him what he was talking about. I was stunned to learn that J.J.

had walked out on the company the day before, in what I heard was a volatile manner. While I was happily and unknowingly driving the 410 miles to Louisville, anticipating my impending night of reffing a match or two, getting an advance, and driving the 410 miles back to Mississippi, J.J. and his family were in their car, headed to Boston for a short vacation. Thankfully, Garea let me work and I got paid, but I knew that from then on, things wouldn't quite be the same.

Chapter 20
WWF Concierge

I knew the "zebra" spot was never going to pan out for me, so I took a small piece of "rope" that J.J. gave me a few weeks before his departure and used it to weave myself a whole new career. J.J. told me he thought it would be good for me, and good for the product, if I used my 16 years (at the time) experience to help produce the pre-taped interviews, inserts, and promos that were taped at TV. At first, when I was still refereeing, I thought I could help out in the production department during the day, before I had to get my assigned matches together. Now that I knew the ref thing was soon to be a fast-fading memory, I decided I would enter this new phase in my career full steam ahead, and do my very best to succeed in my new task.

A few days before my first TV taping as a

member of the production team, Ann Russo (from the WWF office) called and told me I would be working in the interview room with Dok Hendrix (Michael Hayes), who was the producer, and a guy named Dan Winsinski. To this day, I don't know what Dan did, other than posts memos in the backstage area which listed "report times" for the guys to do their interviews. Those memos were virtually ignored and all but useless. I anticipated Dok bringing the relevant information, along with the lists of scheduled interviews, to the meeting so we could put our heads together and use our years of experience to produce the best product we possibly could. What actually transpired was entirely different. Michael did everything, and he wouldn't let me do anything. As Michael/Dok gave the guys the rundown on what their interview was to be about (which "opponent" the "interviewee" was to talk about, what type of match they were plugging, etc.), he had me sit in a dark corner of the cramped room next to an oddball named Will Wynne. After every interview, I would yell out, "Time code,

please." Will would give me the time code, I would say thank you, and write it down. All day long, over and over again, that was my task. It was boring, tedious, and unrewarding. I knew that I had a lot more to offer than writing down technical numbers in dark rooms that were located in the bowels of every arena in the country.

Thankfully, that initial entry into the behind-the-scenes world would actually be the source of me, and in the process, Steve Lombardi, actually becoming more productive and intrinsic to the company than ever before. However, moving comfortably into our new phase in life and career wasn't an overnight task. First, I had to figure out how to escape from the depths of the interview room, and then, without stepping on anybody's toes (especially Dok's), utilize my knowledge, drive, and talents, to benefit the company. I had noticed, over the first few months, that there were innumerable tasks to be done in preparation for a show, and a lack of someone to do those tasks. As I observed the situations, I was amazed at the

infinite number of things that either weren't getting done, or, were inconveniencing people since they had to drop whatever they were doing to do ... whatever. The tasks were limitless, and they ran the spectrum from A to Z: Rental cars had to be returned. Vince needed food. Props were needed for the show. Rental cars had to be picked up. Family members of the executives or top guys needed to be picked up, or dropped off. Vince needed clothes. Prescriptions had to be filled. Reservations had to be made at hotels. People needed to be checked out of their hotels. The agents needed food. Vince needed workout gear and supplies. The top guys needed food. Shane McMahon needed shoes. If Vince was wrestling on a show, I made sure he had the proper attire in the proper sizes. Jim Ross needed something. Kevin Dunn needed something. Bruce Prichard always needed something. That list is just a tip of the iceberg.

Six years later, after I took the responsibility to do … well, everything … things have turned out

rather well. My days are hectic, frantic, and sometimes extremely stressful, but I love my job because I feel like I'm being useful.

Lombardi helped get the whole ball rolling for me by assuming responsibilities in the interview room in my place. He became the "go to" man as far as getting the talent into the room for promos. That benefited both of us because it freed me up to be the "go to" man for the company when it came to details that either went undone or were an inconvenience to those who had to take care of them. Today, Steve makes sure the interviews, pre-tapes, promos, and head shots that the television department requests are done properly and in a timely fashion. Dok Hendrix took an agent's role, then a managerial role, then a creative role in the company, so basically, Steve has full responsibility for the demanding task of not only getting all the work done, and getting it done properly, but leading the horses to water. In other words, getting the sometimes reluctant members of our talent pool to get their asses into the pre-tape

room to do their interviews. I can assure you, there are certain talents who demand to be treated like prima donnas, so that's a full-time job in itself.

With our ring and ringside careers on the decline, Steve and I both tackled our new positions with a passion. As the runner, errand boy, or go-for (I prefer "concierge") of the WWF, my days at work can be extremely busy, although you'll never hear me complain about it. I've always been a firm believer in giving your employer an honest day's work to receive an honest day's pay, and I can honestly say I've earned every dollar that has passed through my hands.

My only complaint is that some people, like "Mr. No Personality" Bob Clarke, think I'm under his command to do stupid, unnecessary, time-wasting tasks. Bob has called me while I'm in the process of picking up Triple H's lost suitcase from the airport, buying groceries for Stephanie McMahon, and getting a prescription filled for Linda, and told

me to return immediately to whatever arena we were at. When I got there, Bob would have the audacity to tell me that one of the talents has a sore elbow, and he wants me to ride with him to the doctor, and sit in the waiting room while he's being examined. Never mind the umpteen different tasks that would go undone. Disregard the fact that the wrestler himself would say (on many occasions), "Harvey, I'm a grown man. Why does Bob Clarke think I need you to come sit with me?" Yes, it's important for the wrestlers to be examined and treated for any injuries that may befall them. But, Bob. It's not my job! I'm already juggling 99 tasks at one time, and I'm not complaining because that's my job, but to bring my responsibilities to a screeching halt is not only ridiculous, it's a waste of my time, not to mention being detrimental to the company.

One day, Bob asked me to go to the hospital with Mick Foley. I was in the middle of a project for Vince, so I told him I just couldn't do it. In his typical, over-reactive attitude, Bob started to shake

and sweat, and then told Steve Lombardi to do it. Steve had a list of interviews that had to be taped, so he told Bob he couldn't do it, either. Bob threw a tantrum that would put a 6-year-old child to shame, raising so much hell that Steve, against his better judgment, told Bob that he would go to the hospital with Mick (who not only didn't want to go, but certainly didn't want or need a chaperone). For his efforts, the only thanks Steve received from Bob was a loud, "Fu– you, Steve!," as he and Mick walked down the crowded hallway at the Joe Louis Arena in Detroit, Michigan. That was only one of the times that "Bobo" blew up at Steve, but I wasn't so fortunate. I didn't get cursed out, or yelled at, but I was repeatedly asked to do absurd "hospitality duty."

It's strange that Bob Clarke would be a part of the talent relations department since he has no earthly idea of how to relate to anybody. The man has absolutely no relations skills, and the personality of a 2x4 piece of lumber. You won't get that assessment from just me and Lombardi,

either. I've seen and heard of Bobo having problems with Terry and Julie Anderson (our talented and skillful seamstresses, both of whom are very nice people and easy to get along with), Brock Lesnar, Jim Cornette, Brian Hebner, as well as various building and arena personnel and employees. Bob Clarke has the tact and diplomacy of Adolf Hitler.

Thankfully, my great friend, Johnny Ace [John Laurinaitus], had it placed in stone that medical situations were not my job! As a side note, I would like to mention that Johnny Ace has been the greatest guy I've had the privilege of working under during the entire time I've been with the WWF/WWE … bar none!

Aside from Bob Clarke and his idiocy, I absolutely love having so much responsibility, and I pride myself on getting everything accomplished and completed correctly. I also have had the pleasure and the luxury of seeing so much talent come to the WWF/WWE, especially some of the

guys I have known from previous affiliations in other wrestling organizations. Earlier, I mentioned that Dwayne Johnson had his tryout match with Steve Lombardi in Corpus Christi, Texas, and that Dwayne, of course, went on to become the "Rock," which needs no explanation or introduction. But, as Paul Harvey always says in his broadcasts, here's "the rest of the story."

Dwayne, of course, passed his tryout with flying colors, and was promptly signed to a basic contract with the WWF. Of course, after only one professional match, Dwayne wasn't ready for the full-time rigors of the WWF, or ready to have good matches on a regular basis. He needed experience and a lot of practice, so Dwayne was sent to work full-time in the Memphis territory, my old stamping grounds, for Lawler and booker Randy Hales. Ann Russo had called me at home, and since I'm from the area, asked me to find a reasonably priced place for Dwayne to "hang his hat" while he was working for the USWA. When other guys had been sent to Memphis to learn and develop (hence, the

"developmental" contract), such as Barry "Bull" Buchanan, Bart Sawyer, Baldo (real name Matt Bloom, WWE name Prince Albert), Shawn Stasiak, Mick Tierney, Glen Kulka, Crash Holly, "Slick" Robbie D, Vic Grimes, Jason Sensation (what a joke), and Giant Silva (nice guy, no brain), I would often suggest various pay-by-the-week motels, rooming houses, or inexpensive apartments. Even Kurt Angle stayed in those places when he went to Memphis to hone his skills.

Dwayne, however, was different. He was my close friend, my "kanaka." He is practically like a little (big) brother to me, and he is one of the few people in this world who I would invite to stay with me in my house in Walls, Mississippi. In fact, that's exactly what I did. Unfortunately, I don't think Dwayne quite shared my enthusiasm. Don't get me wrong. He was very appreciative and grateful for my hospitality, and to this day, reminds me of that fact, but Dwayne had grown up, both physically and mentally, since our

last "run" together. A laid-back, one-horse, deep-south, town in the Mississippi delta wasn't exactly Dwayne's ideal environment, nor was my "lived-in" house, where at any given time, Chilly Willy, White Boy Bobby, my uncle Larry, or any number of my "high-class" friends, relations, associates, or acquaintances, might drop in without the formality of an invitation. Often, an argument would erupt, usually involving or caused by somebody consuming an excessive amount of beer or liquor, and more often than not, something would get broken or knocked over. In the past few years, I've put a stop to unlimited guests and excessive drinking at my home, but in 1996, until something finally snapped in my head telling me that enough was enough, I actually enjoyed the bedlam. You could always tell when something was about to be broken, or somebody was about to get hurt, because it was invariably preceded by a call of, "Hey, ya'll. Watch this!" That was usually followed by a loud crash or dull thud. For some inexplicable reason, Dwayne found and moved to an apartment in midtown Memphis.

Wrestling as "Flex Kavana," Dwayne quickly learned his craft. He worked with a number of very experienced and knowledgeable veterans, such as Jerry "The King" Lawler, "Superstar" Bill Dundee, Don Bass, Tony Falk, Brickhouse Brown, Ken Wayne, and that helped groom him for the success he would eventually achieve.

After a very dull and uneventful run in the WWF as Rocky Maivia, a generic babyface who wore a goofy-looking, fringed outfit, and sporting a ridiculous haircut, "The Rock" rose out of the ashes, and the rest is history. If you want to know the rest of the story, be sure to check out Dwayne's book, The Rock Says … I enjoyed it, and so did a lot of people, since it was number one on the New York Times bestseller list for 20 weeks. Since then, Rock has appeared in more than 14 movies and is a top talent in the entertainment industry. However, I can say with all honesty that even with all of the success he has attained, the money he has made, the movies, TV appearances, championship reigns, main-events, and pay-per-

view events he headlined, The Rock is still a terrific guy and a true friend. He treats me with the same friendship and respect he treated me with when we were in our car-buying, cruising, midnight-ride days. Rock is, was, and always will be a true class act.

Over the years, I've come to the conclusion that 99.9 percent of the top guys in the WWF are class acts! I mean the TOP top guys; the cream of the crop. I've been with the company longer than most of them, and although this is by no means a complete list, I've seen them all: Roddy Piper, Sid Vicious, Hulk Hogan, Shawn Michaels, "Stone Cold" Steve Austin, Bret Hart, Triple-H, Undertaker, The Rock, and Kurt Angle. Roddy Piper was very respectful towards me. Like Hulk Hogan, he also bumped and sold for me in Memphis, which was a really nice thing to do. Sid and I have our own strange story, one which I've already told ad nauseam. Hogan, who treated me like gold since the first day we met, is one guy who deserves everything good that he has.

Shawn Michaels is a very interesting guy. As I've stated time and time again, I truly believe that Shawn is, beyond a shadow of a doubt, the greatest all-around worker to ever have stepped into the ring, bar none. Shawn truly had it all (and still does, for that matter). He looked good, he worked hard, and there wasn't a move he couldn't do. Most importantly, he always knew exactly when to do things. His athleticism was second to none, and his psychology was right on the money. A lot of people, at one point in time or another, complained about Shawn's attitude. They didn't like his temper or demeanor. I've never been in a situation where he treated me badly, or with disrespect. I've known Shawn since he and Marty Jannetty were the A.W.A. tag team champions in Minneapolis, and they came to Memphis in 1987 to work with Paul Diamond and Pat Tanaka. He knew I had put in my time, and I think he respected that.

One day, as I was going about my normal errands, Oscar, a non-wrestling person who was the so-

called "manager" of Mabel and Mo (Men On a Mission), condescendingly asked me where his food was. Shawn, who was sitting in the dressing room, caught me totally off guard when he stood up and told Oscar to, "Get the fu– out of the dressing room. It's bullsh– for you to be full-time on the road, while a veteran like Bruno, who has paid his dues, is running errands and isn't being booked on the road. If I ever hear you ask Bruno for another favor of any kind, I'll throw your ass out into the street!" Just as suddenly as he stood up, Shawn sat back down, and went about his business. I will never, ever forget that. I didn't ask him to do that for me. He just did it because, a) he liked me; b) he respected me; and c) he felt that it was the right thing to do. Thanks, Shawn.

Bret Hart was always cordial and respectful to me, but he had a difficult time separating fact from fiction, and the business from real life. I never met a guy who made so much money, yet stayed so unhappy and miserable. At least, not since Sid in his first New York run. The one thing he never

seemed to understand was that the finishes in our business are predetermined. There was no earthly reason for him to have such an aversion to dropping the title to anyone, at any time, or in any place. The match in which he won the belt wasn't real, and it wasn't real when it was time to lose it, either.

On the other hand, I have to give kudos to Bret for his performances. Bret and Shawn always had first-rate matches, second to none, with all the moves down to perfection and executed at precisely the right time. Watching tapes of a Shawn Michaels/Bret Hart match should be mandatory for all prospective members of our profession. The new guys just don't understand that the moves by themselves mean absolutely nothing. Nothing! Sure, it looks great to do a triple-somersault through a table from the top rope, then roll out onto the floor so your opponent can do a flying vault over the ropes and land on you with a frog splash, but where is the psychology? Shawn Michaels could get a bigger reaction by working

the arm than most guys could get from a ladder match.

While we're on the subject of ladder matches, and I mean no disrespect to any of the guys who participated in the most recent ones, but Shawn Michaels set the bar so high for ladder matches that no one has ever surpassed his performance with Razor Ramon in Pittsburgh. Well, perhaps Shawn himself in the "encore" match at the Garden, but in my opinion, nobody else ever will. I take nothing away from Matt and Jeff Hardy, Edge, Christian, or the Dudley Boyz. They had great ladder matches, but Shawn is "the best there is, the best there was, and the best there ever will be." Sorry, Bret. As Kurt Angle would say, "It's true! It's true!"

Near the end of the Shawn versus Bret program, emotions ran wild in the dressing room. There were very bad feelings between Shawn and Bret, and they all came to a head one night at the Hartford Civic Center in (duh!) Hartford. I was

having a conversation with Jerry Lawler and Steve Lombardi in a corner of the dressing room when, all of a sudden, we heard heated words from the opposite side of the room. It was Bret reading Shawn the riot act. I don't know what precipitated the act, but in a nanosecond, Bret lashed out at Shawn with his fist, then grabbed Shawn by the hair of the head and held on for dear life. Several of the wrestlers present broke them apart, but not before Bret took out a patch of Shawn's hair that was thick enough to make a hair piece for Rene Goulet.

Of course, everybody knows the outcome of the final Bret/Shawn match. I had already left the arena by the time the match started because I had to drive to Ottawa to pick up Butterbean, and didn't hear about it until the next day when Pat Patterson told me about it. I don't know all the details, so it would be foolish of me to elaborate on the situation … other than to say this: Our business is work! You don't become the champion because you are the best wrestler, or the toughest guy, or

even because you are the most deserving. You become champion because the office decided to make you the champion, and when the office thinks it's somebody else's turn, then the next guy gets to be the champion until "his" turn is over. It's a never-ending cycle. Bret didn't want to lay down in Canada. Period. As much as I like Bret, I have no respect for his decision. Rule number one in our business is simple: Do what the guy paying you tells you to do. If you were a painter, and the homeowner told you to paint his house blue, would you argue? Would you paint it green? Would you quit? No! You would paint the house blue, get paid, and leave. Suffice it to say that I'm glad Bret's not my house painter, if you get the analogy.

Another superstar to emerge on the scene in 1995 was Steve Austin. I had known Steve for many years, and I always knew he had the talent to be a top guy. Unfortunately, like the Rock, his initial entry into the WWF didn't go too well. Austin had a crew cut, a goofy name (The "Ringmaster"), a played-out manager ("Million Dollar Man" Ted

DiBiase) who did all the talking, and a really played-out gimmick (as the holder of the "Million Dollar Championship Belt"). Don't get me wrong. I really like Teddy, but as a viable commodity as a talent, his time had passed, much like mine. The last guy to hold the "MDCB" was Virgil, so that should tell you just how truly meaningless the belt really was. Virgil had the talent of a piss-ant and the brains of a dead duck, so obviously, the "MDCB" meant nothing whatsoever.

When Ted DiBiase left the WWF to join up with the nWo in Ted Turner's World Championship Wrestling, Austin became "Stone Cold" Steve Austin. After winning the 1996 King of the Ring event, Steve cut a promo and told the people about his new "Austin 3:16" slogan. That night saw a new era begin in our business. I don't have to spend much time telling the story of Steve Austin's success. Every wrestling fan knows about that. However, I would remiss if I didn't say that Austin is a very good friend and a real man's

man. I wish him all the best and hope he returns to the WWE one day.

Hunter Hearst Helmsley –"Triple H" — also came into his own around this time, and when Vince handed him the football, he ran with it, and scored! I never met anybody with more to offer our business. HHH is the real "Total Package," not Lex Luger. Luger had a Mr. Olympia-like body, but after his entrance music stopped playing, there was nothing left. HHH, on the other hand, has it all: the body, looks, ability, psychology, dedication, charisma, heart, and drive. I've never seen somebody work so hard to be the best, and it has definitely paid off for him. When HHH first came to the WWF, he played the part of a rich snob from Greenwich, Connecticut. Even during a period of less-than-stellar gimmicks like Jean Pierre Lafitte, Henry O. Godwin, Mabel and Mo, and Bull Nakano, it wasn't exactly a resounding debut into the WWF. In 1997, HHH hooked up with Shawn Michaels, Chyna, and Rick Rude, to form the team known as D-Generation X

(DX). HHH was able to shed his rather … well, boring gimmick. That, in itself, was another turning point for the WWF, but it was more of a career-changing event for Triple H. The organ music that was played when HHH came to the ring was replaced by modern, thumping, hard rock music. His smoking jacket and tweedy pants were replaced by faded jeans and a leather jacket. And, most importantly, instead of participating in Hog Pen matches with Henry O. Godwin, Hunter was now an upper-echelon heel in our business, and poised for true super-stardom.

In 1998, when Shawn Michaels decided to leave the WWF due to injuries, burnout, and personal issues, HHH was put into the driver's seat as the new leader of DX, and the rest, as they say, is history. After DX ran its course, Triple H became a star in his own right, and he deserves every bit of success he has earned — and I stress that word: EARNED. The devastating injuries alone that HHH has fought his way back from earn him a place in my "respect book," and my "respect book"

is mighty thin. I'm sure Triple H has earned enough money to live comfortably for the rest of his life, but that would be the easy way out — the Bill Goldberg way out. I never met Goldberg, but I'm convinced that he was strictly in the business for the money. He had no love or respect for our business. HHH, on the other hand, truly cares about what we do for a living, and he respects what makes us all a living. If I put as many hours in the beer joint as Hunter puts in the gym, I would be … well, I guess I would be the same. Bad analogy. Okay, how about this one. If I spent as much time in the tanning-bed as Hunter spends in the gym, I would look like Koko B. Ware! How about that! Triple H has always treated me with the ultimate in courtesy and respect, not to mention friendship.

The "Deadman" is another class act and a real prince of a guy. After knocking (telling the truth) about so many people in this book, I'm overjoyed to be able to honestly say so many good things about our top guys. It's a testament to the

truthfulness in the old saying that "the cream always rises to the top." The Undertaker certainly fits that description. He is a throwback to the top guys in the old days of our business, with enough "new millennium" thrown in to keep him current and vital. I've never seen somebody's persona go through so many changes and new starts as those gone through by the Deadman, and, strangely enough, he gets over more with each "makeover." In 1990, the original Undertaker was modeled after a mortician from old Western films. He wore a large black hat, gray gloves, and a gray necktie. In 1996, he wore a ghostly, grey upper facemask, followed by a devil-worship type of gimmick in 1999. He transformed into an evil biker in 2000 and was called the "American Bad Ass." A few months later, he turned babyface … and he was still over with the fans. Today, he is still the Undertaker, and he deserves every bit of success he has achieved.

Another very deserving individual is Kurt Angle. As a two-time NCAA Division 1 wrestling

champion, and a gold medal winner in heavyweight freestyle wrestling in the 1996 summer Olympics, Kurt may well be the most successful crossover athlete of all time. Ken Patera came into our business after competing in the Olympics as a weightlifter, as did Mark Henry, and they've both done well. Football players like Wahoo McDaniel, Ernie Ladd, and Bill Goldberg have had great success in our business, while Bill Kazmaier and Ted Arcidi, world class powerlifters … well, haven't. Kurt, however, is one of a kind. He mastered our business in record time. Yes — mastered. Kurt, who is very humble and possesses no ego whatsoever, would vehemently disagree with that statement. He certainly never would claim to have mastered our business, so people like me have to do it for him. Kurt has only been in the wrestling business since 1998, but he is already considered to be one of the all-time greats. In the ring, he has no peer. Like Triple H, Kurt can work, talk, looks great, and is a great athlete. In addition, like Triple H, Rock, Hogan, Austin, Undertaker, and

Shawn Michaels, Kurt is a great person.

By now, you may be wondering if I am living in some type of Never-Never-Land where everybody in the WWF is wonderful. Well, it's time to change all of that. It's time to discuss Bruce Prichard. Yes, I've been teasing the Bruce Prichard saga from the beginning of this book, and by now, you may be thinking that Bruce is the sorriest, most evil, no-good, rotten, bastard, that Satan ever spawned. Well, I'm sorry for the disappointment, but Bruce isn't quite that bad. Bruce just has a knack for being, more often than not, a real jerk, and most of the time, he applies his "jerkness" to me. All of the knocks, jabs, and pointed comments I've directed at Bruce throughout this book are my way to finally get even with him for all the crap he's put me through over the years. I hope Bruce is still my friend after this, but a man's gotta do what a man's gotta do, and Bruce — this is what I've gotta do!

For those of you who don't know who Bruce

Prichard is (which is probably most of you), let me enlighten you. Bruce was the proud owner of the stale Brother Love gimmick in the late '80s. Remember him? Barely, huh? Well, in his post Brother Love life, Bruce has become a television production supervisor for the WWF/WWE, and he does a really fantastic job at it, too. I have nothing but respect for how hard Bruce works and what a difficult job he has.

So, what's the problem? Why have I spent so much time talking about Bruce? Well here goes: As the WWF/WWE concierge, I try to accommodate everyone's needs, and help make everyone's day, job, and life on the road, run just a little bit smoother. I take pride in helping out everyone as much as I can, within reason … but those are two key words the meaning of which Bruce never has been able to grasp: within reason. Therein lies the problem.

My main, first, and foremost responsibility, is to make sure the McMahons are taken care of. Vince,

Shane, Stephanie, and Linda are my priority. Vince's office at the arena is my main concern. After I've ascertained that enough food, protein shakes, protein bars, spring water, diet tea, cashews, fat-free milk, fat-free cheese, and whatever the request of the day might be, has been provided for them, then I'm free to do other tasks that arise. Sometimes, a rental car has to be returned for a top guy. At other times, a rental car needs to be picked up. I locate items needed for the production of a show. When the family member of an executive or a top guy is in need of a ride to or from the arena, I make sure the arrangements are taken care of. The tasks are varied, and there is never a dull moment. I've had days when I've picked up Undertaker's mother, located and bought metal trash cans for the show, picked up Shane's wife, bought shoes for Vince, found a special set of sweat suits for Shane, and other tasks too numerous to mention. Those duties all fall within my job description. I do whatever is asked of me (within reason, Bruce) and I'm proud to be depended on by so many people.

I only have two complaints. One, Bob Clarke thinks I can drop all of those responsibilities to babysit fully grown men (which I've already covered in detail), and two, Bruce Prichard's insane requests, and the even more insane way in which he deals with rejection.

Whenever I finish my necessary tasks for the McMahons and top talent, I'm free to do favors for other people, such as go out and bring food back to the arena. Bruce is always the oddball when it comes to this. Don't get me wrong. I'm always glad to bring a snack or a meal for somebody if I have time. I've picked up Italian subs, hamburgers, turkey sandwiches, pizza, steaks, or whatever was convenient, and brought them back to the arena for various people. The key here is "convenient to the arena." When the guys get hungry, they will invariably ask me what restaurants are nearby. If I tell them Wendy's, they'll ask for a hamburger. If I tell them KFC, they'll ask for chicken. If I tell them Taco Bell, they'll opt for Mexican food. If I say Red Lobster,

they'll ask for seafood. You get the idea.

Bruce didn't get the idea, and I don't think he ever will. For example, if I told him Burger King was nearby, Bruce was dying to have Popeye's chicken. If I happened to mention that Popeye's was next door, Bruce requested a Whopper from Burger King. If I came out with the revelation that both Popeye's and Burger King are near the building, Bruce would suddenly have an urge for the oddest, most unusual, ridiculous item you ever heard of, like Moroccan cuisine, or Korean barbeque, or Jamaican jerky, or some such oddity that nobody eats.

If I said I didn't want to scour the entire state for Icelandic trout, or Dutch fried apples, he would give me one of his standard replies, which was usually, "You never want to do anything. I see how you are." No matter how odd or ridiculous Bruce's requests were, he managed to top himself every week. He had a strange habit of asking for things that were completely foreign to the area we

were in. When we were in San Francisco, he would ask for Texas-style barbeque, and then bitch at me if I was unable to find it. He would ask for Japanese sushi in Omaha, New England clam chowder in Dallas, and Kansas City strip in New Hampshire. I could fill three notebooks with his odd requests and responses. Deep down, I knew he was pulling my chain, but somewhere along the line, it went past the point of being a rib, and it all became very uncomfortable to me. He really took advantage of me when he was in his short-lived position as Head of Talent Relations.

I can't put my finger on the exact incident that made me realize that Bruce was taking his game a little too far. Maybe it was the time in Baltimore when the worst snowstorm in 30 years hit the northeast. Not only did we postpone the show until the next day, but the local Baltimore meteorologists were begging everyone to stay indoors. Irregardless, Bruce had me walk six blocks in the blinding snow to buy him chewing gum (which he later denied, even though he did it

in front of witnesses). Or perhaps it was the time we were at the Fleet Center in Boston (the septic tank of the universe) and he had me drive 55 miles (one way) to New Hampshire to pick up an order of Bulgoki (Korean style barbeque that smelled like a combination of vomit, piss, and feces), only to have Bruce complain that I didn't get a big enough order. Or, possibly, it was the time in Louisville, when Bruce wanted fresh-squeezed lemonade at 10:45, 15 minutes before RAW was to be over. Disregard the fact that the concession stands were closed. Disregard the fact that it was almost time to leave. Disregard anything when Bruce has a request. Fortunately, one of the ladies who worked the concession stand was still there, but I practically had to pull a knife on her to get her to give me a lemonade. When I handed it to Bruce, he took one sip, claimed it wasn't fresh squeezed (even though I stood right there and watched the lady squeeze it), and poured it out onto the floor.

Well, rather than write an entire new book called "Bruce's Retarded Desires," let me just relate the

incident that put the icing on the cake concerning the two of us. It took place in New York City and was what I refer to as "The Pizza Incident." I'll never forget it. We were in Madison Square Garden, which is located at 8th Avenue and 33rd Street; right in the heart of Manhattan. Now, if you've ever been to New York City, you know that you can't flip a quarter across the sidewalk without hitting a pizza joint. They're everywhere! So when Bruce asked for pizza, I was happy to oblige, although I was shocked by the simplicity of his request. That was very uncharacteristic of Bruce. My shock didn't last for long, because, very characteristically, Bruce told me he wanted pizza from Big Nick's Pizza Joint, located at 77th and Broadway, 44 blocks from the Garden.

When we're at the Garden, I walk all of my errands, because everything is in close proximity, but to walk 44 blocks would be next to impossible. Even in a taxi, it would be a 45-minute trip. I tried to explain how absurd his

request was, but to no avail. I gave Bruce all the valid reasons as to why it was a bad idea, not to mention a very stupid one. I explained that it wasn't a good idea for me to gallivant so far away from the building for something so trivial, especially since there were probably 30 pizza joints within a 3-minute walk from the Garden. I also attempted to explain that it wouldn't be a good idea for me to be gone, just in case Vince or Stephanie called me with a request.

Bruce, who is a master at twisting words and making people feel badly about themselves, kicked his evil skills into high gear at that point. First, he claimed to not be aware that Big Nick's was 44 blocks away. When I pointed out that he specifically gave me the location of 77th and Broadway, he said he didn't realize Manhattan streets were numbered consecutively! What an insult to my intelligence! A kindergartener who can count to 100 knows that 1st Street is followed by 2nd Street, then 3rd, then 4th, and so on into perpetuity, and 33rd Street is followed by 77th

Street … 44 blocks later. It doesn't take a geometry and algebra scientist to work that out. When tourists from Iowa get off the bus in New York City, they catch onto that arrangement within 45 seconds of hitting the pavement. But Bruce Prichard, a very intelligent individual, who has written entire WWF TV shows, who produced highly-rated, backstage segments, who ran the entire WWF developmental program for quite some time, who has made a good living in our profession and traveled the world for approximately 20 years, could not grasp the concept. In Bruce's warped mind, he expected me to believe he thought the streets were numbered completely at random. Sure, Bruce. 12th is followed by 57th, which is followed by 6th, which is, in turn, followed by 63rd. Nice try.

Believe it or not, I'd like to thank Bruce Prichard. For many years, he showed me, by example, exactly how to lose friends and alienate people. If I ever decide I want to become extremely disliked by everybody, I have all the

tools I need. You taught me by example exactly how I should go about doing it.

What's frustrating, however, is that just when I'm about to throw darts at Bruce's picture (or Bruce himself), he'll turn around and do something so nice, or so kind and sweet, that I'll actually feel badly about hating his guts. For example, during an ongoing health concern I've been going through, Bruce was the first person to call my house to make sure I was doing okay. He was also the first person to call me after the Joey wreck, and the first one to call me after I was bedridden with food poisoning. Basically, what I'm getting at is, Bruce is a good guy with a very warped sense of humor, who just won't let me hate him! That may be the most frustrating "Bruceism" of all. God bless you and your entire beautiful family, Bruce. You are my friend. And … now we're even.

On a sad note, and off the subject, I want to make one last mention of my old friend, Mike Davis. He died of a massive heart attack at his home in

Granbury, Texas, on December 25, 2001. That was one of the saddest pieces of news I've ever had the displeasure to hear, and I wanted to take this opportunity to pay tribute to a good friend. God bless you, Mike. I know you're in a better place now. Wow, what a territory God has for himself behind the pearly gates. I just hope I'm not on the card anytime soon.

Chapter 21
WWF Women's Champion

By the year 2000, I was well into my new life as the premier (and only) concierge in the WWF, and the last thing I ever expected was to become the WWF champion! Believe it or not, I did. Okay, it was the WWF Women's Championship, but nevertheless, I became the champ. Confused? I don't blame you. Truthfully, I am, too, even to this day.

My run as champion began innocently enough. I was involved in a comedy skit with the Fabulous Moolah, the legendary ladies champion (icon), and things got blown a little out of proportion. Mark Henry was doing a gimmick in which he called himself "Sexual Chocolate," and portrayed a sex-addict who was in love with — brace yourself —

Mae Young, an 80-year-old woman with more wrinkles than a Shar-Pei and more ancient history under her belt than the Holy Roman Empire. Mae, who had been a top female wrestler in the 1940s, was Moolah's TV (and real life) sidekick. You rarely saw one without the other. One day, in a backstage vignette for RAW, Mark asked Mae Young out on a date, but she wouldn't go out with him unless he found a date for Moolah. As Mark and Mae argued over the situation at hand, who walked in but little Harvey Wippleman (me). I was immediately drafted by Mark Henry to be Moolah's date for the evening. We did a series of vignettes, showing us on our "double date" at a local restaurant (in Greensboro, North Carolina that particular evening), in the parking lot, and eventually, in a hotel room, with Mark and Mae in one bed, and (gulp) me and Moolah in another!

I figured that would be the end of it; a one-night stand in more ways than one. Boy, was I ever wrong. For some reason, the office saw chemistry between me and Moolah, and they actually put me

back into a managerial position. I started to accompany Moolah to the ring for all her TV appearances. Michael "P.S." Hayes was the agent for Moolah's matches, and he had big plans for our gimmick; plans that I wanted no part of. Period. I like Michael a lot. He's a really good guy and I consider him a friend, but I had no desire to participate in what he had in mind. Sorry, "P.S.," but that's the way I felt about it.

I don't recall exactly how the situation transpired, mainly because I was trying to do my main job of being the gopher ... I mean, concierge. The skit, which was really just an afterthought, became, more or less, an inconvenience. I was concerned about tending to Vince's needs, not being featured on TV for "one last hurrah." Anyway, for whatever reasons, after Miss Moolah's matches, Hayes always had me wind up in the ring. I would have a confrontation with one of the boys, like Prince Albert or Bob Holly. Hayes always gave me my instructions with great enthusiasm. "Have Albert give you his double-kamikaze neck-

breaker," or "Have Bob give you a gut-buster super-slam," or some other form of ridiculously devastating, pre-meditated, bodily abuse. I had three really good reasons for not going along with those wacky ideas. First of all, my body — particularly my neck — was already messed up for life, and I didn't need any further trauma. Two, I knew that it was a short-lived, comic-relief gimmick, with a three-week shelf-life (tops), and that wasn't worth risking injury and causing me to lose my real job as concierge. And finally, Michael Hayes, who was telling me to take all of those bumps, wouldn't have dreamed of taking any of those bumps in his day. Never. In his days as one of the Fabulous Freebirds, he was never a bump man. He was a kicker, a puncher, a walker, and a talker. Don't get me wrong. He was over in a lot of places, but he never took the big bumps, so I didn't think he had the right to ask me to do them. With my neck problems and my other responsibilities facing me, I had to "just say no." Hayes would then walk away and let us work out whatever it was we wanted to do. They would

punch me, shove me, or do something else that would allow me to take my own bump.

Hayes finally walked up to me one night in Richmond and told me that if I didn't start taking big, devastating bumps, I would be taken out of the gimmick. I didn't know whether to kiss him or give him $500. Didn't he understand? I wanted to be taken out of the gimmick! "Okay, Michael," I replied. "If you want me to take bumps, make me the ladies champion."

Me and my big mouth. One month later, on January 31, 2000, I walked into the Pittsburgh Civic Arena. Satisfied in the knowledge that my program with Moolah was over, and that I could concentrate totally on my concierge duties, lo and behold, "P.S." Hayes excitedly told me that I was going to work with the Kat that night in a championship match. "What?" Kat, a.k.a. Stacy Carter, was Jerry Lawler's girlfriend and the WWF Women's champion at the time. Hayes proceeded to tell me that not only was I going to

participate in a championship match that night, but I was going over [going to win]. I was going to become the champion. But, wait. It gets even better. Or worse … depending on how you look at it. The match wasn't going to be held in the ring. It was going to be contested in a wading pool full of snow, and I was going to be dressed like a woman — wig, nail polish, and all. Couple that with the fact that in my best day, even at 25 years old, I wasn't a very good worker, and Kat, who was getting by mainly on her looks (which were more than enough, I must admit), couldn't work at all. We were doomed from the start. At the time, I was 34 years old, washed-up, beaten-down, put upon, and constantly in pain, so the match had the potential to be a real disaster.

If nothing else, I must say that the match certainly lived up to that potential, in spades. It was the worst match ever in the history of the WWF. There is no arguing the fact. Vince McMahon himself told me that, and he was 100 percent correct. I couldn't have had a worse match

if I had done it intentionally (which I would never do). It sucked beyond belief.

Mercifully, it didn't last long. I was announced as "Harvina" from Intercourse, Pennsylvania, and oddly enough, nobody realized who I was. After the introductions, the bell rang, and everything went downhill from there. Moolah, Mae Young, Jacqueline, BB, Ivory, and Luna Vachon were all stationed around the "ring" as "Lumber-Jills" for our "Snowbunny" match. As a very untalented (ring-wise), young, beautiful girl rolled around in a bucket of snow with a blind, 34-year-old, out-of-shape gopher with a drinking problem, and five other ladies threw snowballs at us and each other, the people in attendance and at home watched the match on live television. We made the unlikely match-up of Giant González versus Ultimate Warrior look like Shawn Michaels versus Bret Hart by comparison. Yes, it was that bad. What was even worse was that the next day in Detroit, Lawler put every bit of the blame squarely on my narrow shoulders. Looking back on it, I realize

Jerry was just defending the girl he loved, the one who would eventually show him how bad she could screw him over, while still smiling sweetly into his face. At the time, however, he thought her poop didn't stink.

There was a reason for Kat dropping the belt to me. When I dropped the belt to Jacqueline the very next night (in the Joe Louis Arena in Detroit), it should have dawned on Lawler , as it did to me and everyone else in the WWF, why they did what they did. To put it simply, they put the belt on Kat as a short-term gimmick to have a little sex-kitten parading around with the belt. They knew she wasn't talented enough to carry the belt for long because she wasn't actually a "wrestler," per se. They wanted the belt on Jackie, a capable worker and a tremendous athlete, but they knew that as stiff and snug as Jackie was (and is) in the ring, she would tear Kat's head off, and that would be with no malice intended. Stacey (Kat), who was rail-thin, un-athletic, and waif-like, couldn't hold a candle to Jackie or any other "real" female

wrestler. That's where my 1-day reign came in, and how it came to pass. By passing the belt off onto me for one fateful day, they knew I would be able to withstand Jackie's aggressiveness for one match (barely) and drop the belt to her. In a 45-second encounter, I dropped the belt to Jackie and the belt was where the office wanted it. The WWF ladies' division could return to some semblance of normalcy. I wonder if Stacey (or Lawler for that matter) realizes the favor the office did for her by having me beat her instead of Jackie. I was really a scapegoat champion, to save Stacy from getting her frail little ass kicked into the middle of the following week. But regardless, at least I can say that, even if only for one day, I held a belt in the WWF. How many other people can say that?

That would prove to be the last time I would ever be in the ring. It was the final match of my career, and I was glad of it. My body couldn't (and can't) take any more bumping or abuse, so it was for the best. In fact, WrestleMania X-Seven (17) would be my last time to even appear in the ring, and I am

very honored and grateful to be able to say that, as a talent, I went to the top. WrestleMania is the Super Bowl of our business — the Stanley Cup, the World Series, the World Cup, the U.S. Open, the Mr. Olympia ... you get the idea. WrestleMania is the biggest event of the year, the pinnacle, the ultimate, the top of the mountain. I was lucky enough to make my swan song on April 1, 2001, at WrestleMania X-Seven. The show featured a "Gimmick Battle Royal," a match that gave performers of the ‘80s and ‘90s one final shot at the spotlight; one last hurrah. It was basically an old-timers match, a novelty for the fans and one final honor for the veterans: One Man Gang, Sgt. Slaughter, Jim Cornette, Michael Hayes, The Bushwhackers, Kim Chee (my friend Steve Lombardi), Hillbilly Jim, Kamala, Brother Love, Duke Drose, Repo Man, Earthquake, Tugboat, Iron Sheik, Nikolai Volkoff, Gobbledy Gooker (Hector Guerrero), and Doink the Clown. Harvey Wippleman also received his final moment in the sun as I walked to the ring with Kamala and Kim Chee.

After the match, as I walked up the ramp that led to the backstage area of the Houston Astrodome, I looked at the WrestleMania graphics, then back at the ring. It doesn't get any bigger that WrestleMania, and I was grateful to be able to go out on top. I briefly choked up, knowing that was it. More than likely, I would never return to the ring again. I had come a long way since going to the fair in Pennsylvania with Stink-Ass.

I could now close the book on the chapter of my life headed by the "talent" description. I was both happy and sad: sad that a big part of my life was over, but happy about where my career ended. I also was happy and grateful that I still had a wonderful job in the business I love, and with the company I love. Thanks for everything, Vince.

Chapter 22
Shoot All Pandas on Sight

As the days following WrestleMania X-Seven passed, I settled comfortably into my life's work as concierge. I never imagined what September would bring. Nobody did. On September 10th, 2001, RAW was taped in San Antonio, Texas, at the Freeman Coliseum. It was a good day and the taping went off without a hitch. After the show, Steve Lombardi and I drove towards Houston for the next day's taping of Smackdown and Sunday Night Heat. We stopped about halfway, which has always been our policy, and checked into a room in a small town called Schulenburg, Texas. After watching cable TV and drinking a few beers, we turned off the lights. Sometime after midnight, the oddest thing happened. I began sweating, then

shivering, then in a very violent fashion, vomiting uncontrollably. For almost an hour, I puked, gagged, choked, and gasped for air. When Lombardi finally woke up to my symphony of horrors, he began worrying about my well being, which really scared me, since he normally didn't put anything over. I wasn't drunk. I wasn't on drugs. I wasn't doing anything that would have induced such a severe case of vomiting, so I had no idea of what was causing my physical discomfort. Eventually, my body calmed down and I drifted off to sleep.

I slept until Steve's cell phone rang that morning. It was Steve's wife, Sandra, who told us to turn on the TV. A plane had crashed into the World Trade Center! As Steve talked to Sandy on the phone; we watched the chaos unfold on TV, and then my cell phone rang. ReShelle, my long-time significant other (girlfriend for the uninformed), was calling with the same tragic news. ReShelle and I had been through some serious problems together, and we were barely on

speaking terms, but she cared enough to call and check on me during that time of disaster, and I appreciated it. Never in my life had I witnessed such a tragedy. My heart went out to the people in the Twin Towers, the people on the planes, the people in the Pentagon, the NYPD, the FDNY, and the friends, relatives, and loved ones of the victims. God bless each and every one of them. God bless America.

I won't elaborate on the 9-11 situation. There have been a lot of books written by people who are more literate and more qualified than me to discuss 9-11 and the events surrounding it. What I can do, however, is describe the aftermath of 9-11 as far as its effect on our business. Attendance-wise, I don't see where it made much of an impact. The personnel in the WWF who deal with the houses may hold a different opinion, and if I'm wrong, I'm sorry, but, I didn't see any direct problems. Travel, however, was affected in a big way, as you may imagine, particularly air travel, which is as much a part of our life as food and

oxygen.

In the words of Dennis Miller, "Now, I don't want to get off on a rant here," but it's time for me to be politically incorrect, at least as far as the airlines are concerned, but I really don't care. The truth is the truth. The airlines have always sucked, but after 9-11, they sucked more than ever, and more publicly than ever. First of all, the airlines immediately cried out, claiming they were victims in the 9-11 catastrophe, when, in reality, their incompetence had a lot to do with the whole problem to begin with. The security was (and still is) a joke. For instance, at Memphis International Airport before 9-11, I saw a girl I used to date. She was working as a security officer at the point of entry. That, of course, was the final opportunity for security to find bombs, guns, knives, box-cutters, etc. That was before they began performing random security checks at the board gates. That girl (I'll call her Muffy) was about as qualified to work airport security as a member of the Charles Manson family. Muffy was

a pothead, a paper hanger (she wrote a lot of bad checks, on purpose), a shoplifter, and a prostitute (which I discovered long after I broke up with her). And yet, there she was, working at our last line of defense. That made as much sense as non-alcoholic beer, which is no sense at all. Of course, when the people who employ airport security personnel pay them minimum wage, we really can't expect much better. They were very good at asking whether or not you packed your own bag, and if it had been in your control the whole time you were at the airport, and if any strangers had approached you.

That was our pre-9-11 security, but our post-9-11 security at the airports is still a joke. The only difference between "pre" and "post" is that they now put on a big show and act like they know what they're doing. First of all, the random searching of people's bags and bodies as they are about to board an aircraft is as stupid as an electric surfboard. I have news for the security guards. Picking on whomever you feel will give

you the least hassle about being searched is not making our airlines any safer. Patting down an 80-year-old woman, while a bearded guy with a turban marches past without being given a second look, doesn't do much for my confidence level. If that's not bad enough, if I were to say, "Hey, what about the turban guy that just got on the plane?" while they search through my bag, invariably the response I get is, "Timothy McVeigh didn't have on a turban."

"Well, yeah! And Timothy McVeigh wasn't trying to get on an airplane, either."

The possibility for problems actually increase when you're on the airplane. God forbid, if somebody tried something on an aircraft, and there was no federal air marshal on the plane, who would protect you? The flight attendants? A couple of women, or a gay, swishy male or two, whose main goal in life is to make sure your seat is in the upright position and your tray table is stowed. Get serious! Are there any non-swishy

male flight attendants? I've never seen one. What can they do in the event of a hijacking? Hit the hijackers with their purse? Claw them with their nails? Get serious. We need armed, well-trained, highly-skilled, professional security on every flight in this country. Period. Anything less is unacceptable.

"Of course. That's just my opinion. I could be wrong."

But I'm not.

The business has rolled along more or less as usual since 9-11. There have been a few changes — some notable, and some notable only to me. The biggest change has been the change of the name of the company for which I so proudly work: from the World Wrestling Federation (WWF) to World Wrestling Entertainment (WWE). This was due to some legal mumbo-jumbo involving the World Wildlife Fund, the group with a Panda bear as their symbol. Screw them. If I ever see a panda

in Walls, Mississippi, I will shoot the bastard dead and feed it to my cat.

Another significant event took place two months after the name of the company was officially changed. Eric Bischoff was hired to be the "General Manager of RAW," our Monday night TV show. I haven't really discussed World Championship Wrestling [WCW] in this book, simply because I never worked there (or wanted to), so I don't claim to know anything about it. However, Eric was the Vince of WCW, and he produced a product that, for a time, rivaled our product. Personally I respect him very much, and I have told him as much. He is smart to our business to the utmost degree, and he carries himself very well. He has treated me with respect and courtesy since the day I met him and I appreciate that. To me, the most enjoyable thing to watch are the guys who, after they left WCW, knocked him, buried him, and called him every filthy name in the dictionary. When he came to WWE, the same guys were attached to his ass like hemorrhoids, and

pledging their everlasting loyalty. The biggest hemorrhoid/hypocrite of all is Big Show (Paul Wight). Before Eric got a job with the WWE, Big Show called Eric Bischoff everything but a child of God, but when Eric took over as GM, Show's lips fused themselves to Eric's ass.

In the six-and-a-half years since 9-11, I have met a lot of good, talented, hardworking guys who have really paid their dues and deserve to be in the WWE. Edge and Christian, for example, were not only exceptional workers, but they paid their dues in full. They made long trips in vans, slept on the floors of arenas in Indian reservations, made little or no money, and, to their credit; did it all without complaint until they finally reached the goal they had been striving for: a spot in the WWE. Also in that category is my friend Spike Dudley, who, like me, put up the ring, took bumps, made little money, and persevered, despite his small size. He deserves nothing but praise, as does my very close friend, Bob "Hardcore" Holly, who is one of the last remaining old-school veterans who came up

like I did, through the old territory system. Bob, a great worker with a tremendous work ethic, is a credit to our business.

I've witnessed a lot of drama during my time in the wrestling business. I've experienced both good time and bad times, but nothing — I repeat, nothing — could prepare me for the Chris Benoit situation. Sure, Owen Hart's death was shocking and sad, but it was a tragic, freak accident. The premature deaths of Curt Hennig and Eddie Guerrero were a shock to me, as well, but they weren't exactly what I would call "unusual" circumstances, so to speak. Sadly, their deaths were becoming the status quo.

I could use this space to give my opinion on Chris Benoit's final, brutal acts, but why bother? I'm not a psychiatrist. I wasn't in the mind of Chris Benoit when he took the lives of his wife, Nancy, and his son, Daniel. I couldn't begin to understand why he would take his own life. The only way anyone could know for sure is to have been in the house

when it all went down, and personally witness the tragedy that took place.

I'm not one of the people that Chris contacted before he took his life. Were we friends? Yes, but at best, we were casual friends. We got along well, we respected each other for what we each had done in the business, and we talked many times about the dues we paid during our formative years in the business. His position in the business, however, was much loftier than mine, and, as a talent, deservedly so.

The only personal, non-business interaction I had with Chris and his family definitely merits mention here, if for no other reason than to show just how totally opposite he seemed to be in everyday life, from the monster he seemingly became in the final hours of his life.

We were taping TV in Manchester, New Hampshire, one night. Nancy and Daniel were staying at the Manchester Holiday Inn, which was

located across the street from the arena. Chris approached me earlier that day and asked if I would mind going to the motel around 7:30 that night to pick up Nancy and Daniel and bring them to the show. That wasn't an unusual request. I'm proud to say that many of the guys have asked me to escort their families to the arenas. They knew I could be trusted to drive carefully, to be on time, and to refrain from talking in a vulgar manner. Over the years, I have picked up Undertaker's mother, Linda and Marissa McMahon, Batista's daughter, Jerry Lawler's mother, and many others. I list those things only to emphasize the fact that Benoit's request wasn't unusual.

I remember thinking at the time, What a concerned and dedicated family man Chris is. He told me several times that afternoon how much he appreciated me doing that for him. In addition to the concern he showed for his family, throughout the day, he repeatedly asked for reassurance that I didn't mind doing it.

The short trip from the motel to the arena was uneventful. I really didn't know Nancy, even though our paths had crossed many times over the years, but I have to say that she was extremely friendly and appreciative. In regards to little Daniel, she was a text-book, caring mother during the time we were together. She buckled the seat belt around Daniel, buckled up herself, and away we went.

What really struck me, though (and I mentioned this to several people before the tragedy occurred), was just how much that simple favor I did meant to Chris. When we walked into the arena, he thanked me and gave me a sincere hug, not one of the fake ones I mentioned earlier. To someone unaware of the mundane task I had undertaken for Chris, they would have thought he was thanking me for driving his family from California to New Hampshire, not just across the street. Chris then shook my hand and placed two $100 bills in it. I tried to refuse the money, but he almost seemed offended that I would return it. He insisted that I keep it. I didn't

argue. Two hundred bucks was a good kick for me. Remember, I wasn't one of the big money ballplayers.

Returning to the point at hand, that loving, protective, grateful family man is the last person on earth I would ever have predicted would do such a thing as kill his wife and child. As I mentioned, we were not close friends, so I cannot comment on what his home life was like, or what thoughts passed through his mind prior to and during the tragic final days of his life. I can only offer commentary about my one, and only, non-business encounter with the Benoits, and I feel confident it speaks volumes about why the situation was so unlikely that nobody, probably including Chris, ever saw it coming.

I find it totally unfair for Congress, the media, and glory-hungry has-beens like Chyna and Marc Mero, to use that incident to cast aspersions on the entire wrestling industry (with WWE, of course, being at the forefront). People like Nancy Grace

seem to forget about a little matter of personal responsibility, as did Marc Mero, who saw fit to utilize the wave of tragedy to grab his second 15 minutes of fame. However, the fact is that the wrestling business, WWE, and/or Vince McMahon, are not responsible for the individual foibles of people who use drugs, alcohol, or commit murder/suicide. Several years ago, a fireman in the Memphis area shot and killed several people. Should we condemn the Memphis fire department, or, in accordance with the Graces and Meros of the world, all fire departments and firemen all over the country? In 2000, Rae Carruth, a wide receiver with the Carolina Panthers, was found guilty of conspiracy to commit murder, a crime in which his pregnant girlfriend was killed. Do we indict the entire NFL football roster? What about O.J. Simpson? What about the sheriff's deputy who shot and killed six people in Wisconsin last year? The list of atrocities committed in this world is endless, but the bottom line is personal responsibility. Unless this age of entitlement, and "so called" enlightenment, changes

in the future, eventually, nobody will be held responsible for anything they do. Everything will the fault of "somebody else."

The wrestling business is everything for me. Everything I've done, everything I have, everything I've experienced and everything I am, is a direct result of this business.. I'm not rich. In fact, I'm far from it. And I'm not exactly a household word, either, but I've done more in my 42 years on this planet than most people do in a lifetime. I'm thankful to have had the opportunity. I've hung out with L.L. Cool J. I've sat on airplanes next to Lionel Richie, Angie Dickinson, Jennifer Aniston, and Meredith Baxter. I've met Burt Reynolds, Rip Taylor, Timothy Hutton, Leslie Nielsen, Mike Tyson, Ernie Shavers, Michael Clarke Duncan, and Jermaine Jackson. I've drank in bars in Beverly Hills alongside Bernie Kopell, Priscilla Barnes, James Caan, and at various times, Elton John, David Bowie, and Robert Vaughn. I've been on WWF events with Lawrence Taylor, Reba McIntyre,

Salt-n-Pepa, Jennifer Holliday, Ben Stiller, Tommy Lee, Pamela Anderson, Jenny McCarthy, Pete Rose, Chuck Norris, Jenny Garth, Donnie Wahlberg, Ray Combs, Aaron Neville, Arnold Schwarzenegger, and Ice-T. I've traveled to every conceivable corner of the world, including Alaska, Ireland, Germany, Belgium, England, Hawaii, Canada, and all parts beyond and in between.

I've been in prison. . I've been in church and I've been through hell. I've been up and down the road for 29 years and I have less than $100,000 to my name. I'm still in debt, and I'm not financially independent, but guess what? I'm a happy, grateful, secure man. My neck hurts, my head hurts, and I'm always tired and mean, especially when I'm at home during my off days. Very few people can relate to what I've been through, and that's understandable. Who could relate to getting hit with chairs, doing blade jobs, or getting 30 bucks for driving 600 miles?

Only those who paid their dues in the ring and on

the road.

If you're a wrestler, I hope you realize how lucky we are to be a part of the industry. Enjoy the ride while you can, because time passes by quickly, and before you know it, you'll be watching the train pull away from the station without you. And, like pulling your fist out of a bucket of water, the hole left by your (or my) departure will be filled as quickly as the space in the water where your fist had been. We are nothing more than little spokes in a big wheel.

In conclusion, over the past 29 years, I have seen just about everything, and participated in most of it. There has been a lot of negative things happen in my life. I've dealt with assholes (Bruce Prichard), liars (Bruce Prichard), and I've seen a lot of my friends pass away. I hope we can all move forward in a positive way, because negativity only breeds more of the same. Whenever I find myself griping and moaning about things in my life that just aren't going the

way I would like them to go, I remember something Tazz told me. He made a profound statement that hit me like a ton of bricks: We could be digging ditches for a living."

And he was right. I'm sure ditch diggers have to put up with a lot more BS than I do, and have to work harder for a lot less money. God bless pro wrestling, for better or for worse, for richer or for poorer, in sickness and in health — 'til death do us part. Because, as Jim Morrison of The Doors so aptly put it: "Nobody gets out of here alive."

That's my story and I'm sticking to it. I can get away with it, too, 'cause I'm Downtown Bruno, and you're not.

THE END

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